

Course Description

This course is a theological investigation into the fundamental missiological issue of our day. It concerns the Church's encounter with religious pluralism. We regard it unthinkable for a person to claim to be a missiologist without having deliberately sought to acquire a comprehensive grasp of this subject. Throughout the quarter we will particularly seek to explore the relationship between what we understand by the Lordship of Christ as scripturally revealed and religious pluralism. In the course of this exploration we will trace the long history of this debate within the Church as well as review its present status, whether in Conciliar, Catholic, Orthodox or Evangelical circles.

Lectures

This course will involve a series of lectures intermingled with class discussion of essays students will have evaluated prior to class. The following outline indicates the general direction of the lectures, assigned essays and outside reading. The text: "Courage for Dialogue" by Stanley J. Samartha shall be read carefully as scheduled and discussion of its successive chapters shall be conducted at the Friday sessions of the class.

Course Schedule

WEEK 1 - Text: chapter 1; Essays by Hartenstein and Forman

- Religion -- Its Universality
- Revelation -- Its Implications
- Religious Pluralism -- Its Challenges
- Syncretism -- Its Components
- Jesus Christ is Lord -- Our Frame of Reference

WEEK 2 - Text: chapter 5; Essays by Kaufmann and Braaten

- The Old Testament Witness-
 - Hostility to idolatry and its practice
 - Kindness and justice to all people
 - The Gentiles and God's Providence
- Jesus and 1st Century Judaism-
 - The perspectives he substantially accepted
 - The elements he criticized and condemned
 - The conflicts he had with its leaders
- Jesus and Other Religions-
 - His attitude toward Samaritans and their religion
 - His observations on Gentile worship
 - His independence from Jewish conventionality
 - His worldwide outlook (contra Jewish parochialism)
 - His emphasis on moral and spiritual values
 - His exclusive message about access to God

WEEK 3 - Text: chapter 7; Essays by Glasser (Acts 10), DeRidder & Bavinck

Apostolic Encounter with non-Christians

Peter with a Gentile "God Fearer" -- Acts 10,11

Paul with the Jews -- Acts 13:14-52

with pagan animists -- Acts 14:15-17

with Greek intellectuals -- Acts 17:16-34

Apostolic Instruction on Related Issues

John and the "Logos"

Paul and Natural Revelation -- Rom 1:18-32

and Conscience -- Rom 2:11-16

and Idolatry -- 1 Cor 8:1-6; 2 Cor 6:14-18

WEEK 4 - Text: chapter 6; Essay by Newbiggin

Historical Section

Up to Constantine (the 4th century)

The "Logos" Debate: Justin Martyr & the Epistle to Diognetus

The break with Pharisaic Judaism

Uncompromising encounter with non-Christian religions

From Constantine to the Reformers

Early tolerance: generosity & syncretism

The hard line develops

Strife with Jews & Muslims

Reemergence of the irenic spirit

The Reformers: Luther, Calvin, Zwingli and later, Wesley

WEEK 5 - Text: chapter 8; Essays by Stott and Pickard

The Enlightenment, Evolutionism & Historical Criticism

Catholic input: Jesuit "accommodation"

Philosophers: Lessing, Leibnitz and Schopenhauer

Theologians: Schleiermacher and Troeltsch

Missionary Encounter and Scholarship

The Parliament of Religions 1893

WEEK 6 - Text: chapter 2; Essays by Speer and Campbell

The 20th Century

Edinburgh 1910 - The World Missionary Conference

The International Missionary Council - Jerusalem 1928

The Laymen's Missionary Inquiry 1932

WEEK 7 - Text: chapter 9; Essays by Kraemer and Knitter

The International Missionary Council - Madras 1938

The World Council of Churches - since 1961

Vatican Council II - Nostra Aetate

Roman Catholic Theologians: Kung and Rahner

WEEK 8 - Text: chapter 3; Essays by Brockway and Griffiths

Theological Section

Contending Options: at least three!

The Lostness of Mankind

The Irreplaceable Emphases:

The human religious awareness & concern re God

God's universal involvement with all peoples

(He reveals and he seeks)

The reality of the demonic invasion into the religious sphere

WEEK 9 - Text: chapter 4; Essays by Loffler, Shank and Glasser

Mission and Religious Encounter

The Kerygmatic Approach

The Dialogic Approach

The Elenctic Objective

WEEK 10 - Text: chapters 10 & 11; Essays by Lindsey and Grounds

The Crux: Must we evangelize the Jews?

Written Assignments

The essays in the course reader were chosen partly because of their substance, partly because of who wrote them and partly because they reflect particular emphases in the current debate. They must be critically evaluated. Written reports (maximum: 2 pages) noting the author's theological presuppositions, the strengths & weaknesses of his presentation, and the student's personal reactions shall be prepared prior to their being debated in class.

In addition to the above, the student will present a comprehensive paper stating his/her theological approach to the issues posed by religious pluralism. This shall not exceed 10 pages (double spaced).

There will be no final examination, only the requirement that during exam week a brief evaluation (no more than 5 pages) of the Lausanne Occasional Paper dealing with the religion of his/her particular concern.

THEOLOGY OF RELIGIOUS ENCOUNTER: NOTES

1/02/85

Paul Little:

1. Are the heathen lost? - sincerity of worship, life, etc.?
2. Existence of Evil.

THE HIGHEST TRUTH REGARDING GOD AND MAN: JESUS

JESUS

1. God is not just an idea/pure absolute --- moral being.
2. Human race is one,
3. in sin but something of God in all men, Jn 1:9
[we won't forget the Devil or Sin in this course]
4. Human beings demand/deserve our respect
5. Essentiality of dealing in LOVE,
6. Belief in good to triumph.

Jesus is the NORM

course title: Lordship Religious
 of Christ & Pluralism

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1/04/85

Introductory remarks:

"Religion" what do we mean? --- Well known but not easily defined.

FEELINGS of awe/dread/longing/appeal/approval/admiration

↓

↓

STRENGTH (something strong-reflection)

↓

↓

higher unseen power(s)

↓

↓

attitude of reverence/dependence

↓

↓

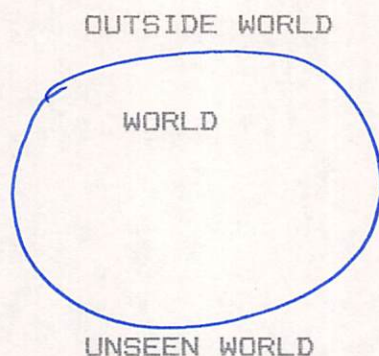
meaning in relationship to this power

Cults, rites, prayers, acts of mercy - each has its own way of expressing faith -

Books, texts, scripture, authority community religious "attitude"

Saints, martyrs, apostles, heretics

UNIVERSAL HUMAN TRUTH: RELIGION



maybe established
in the "world"
but without
contact to the
outside world
life seems mean-
ingless..

IDEOLOGY: eg. Marxism, Nationalism, etc.

unrelated to the outside world -- facing problems within the world.

it also has it - founders

- books/canon

- heretics

- salvation (within the context of the world)

Blending of Ideology and Religion (married)

-----> civil religion eg., "God with us" Nazi Germany

Universality of Religion. Man: religious being.

- irreligion ---> temporary situation. "The human heart must have a god." Martin Luther.

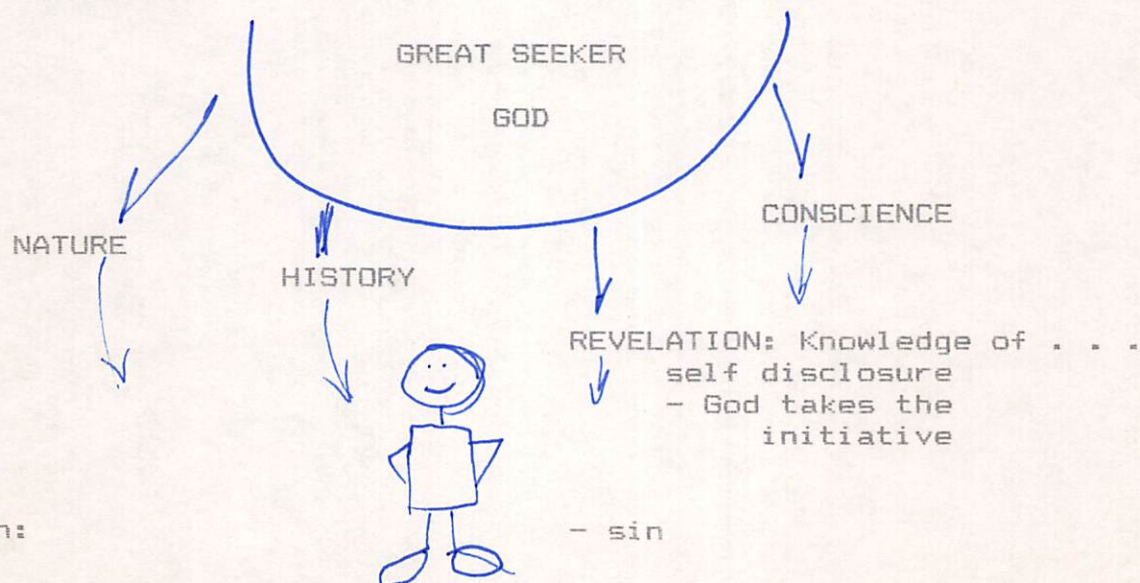
Revelation (the implications)

- breakthrough from the outside

- communication

- radical alteration of life style, world view

- transform

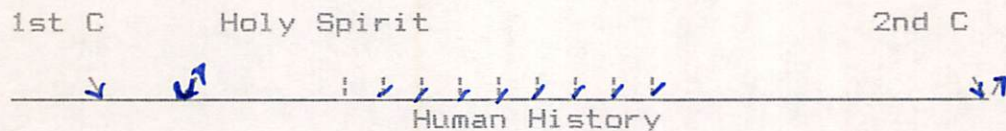


Scriptures provide
spectacles

- fallen
- alienated
- rebellion

Romans 1 - human suppress<

Nature
history
conscience



God discontinuously disclosed himself --- revealed himself not always in the same intensity.

Christian way of looking at revelation radically different to other religions - revelation with universal impact.

Syncretism

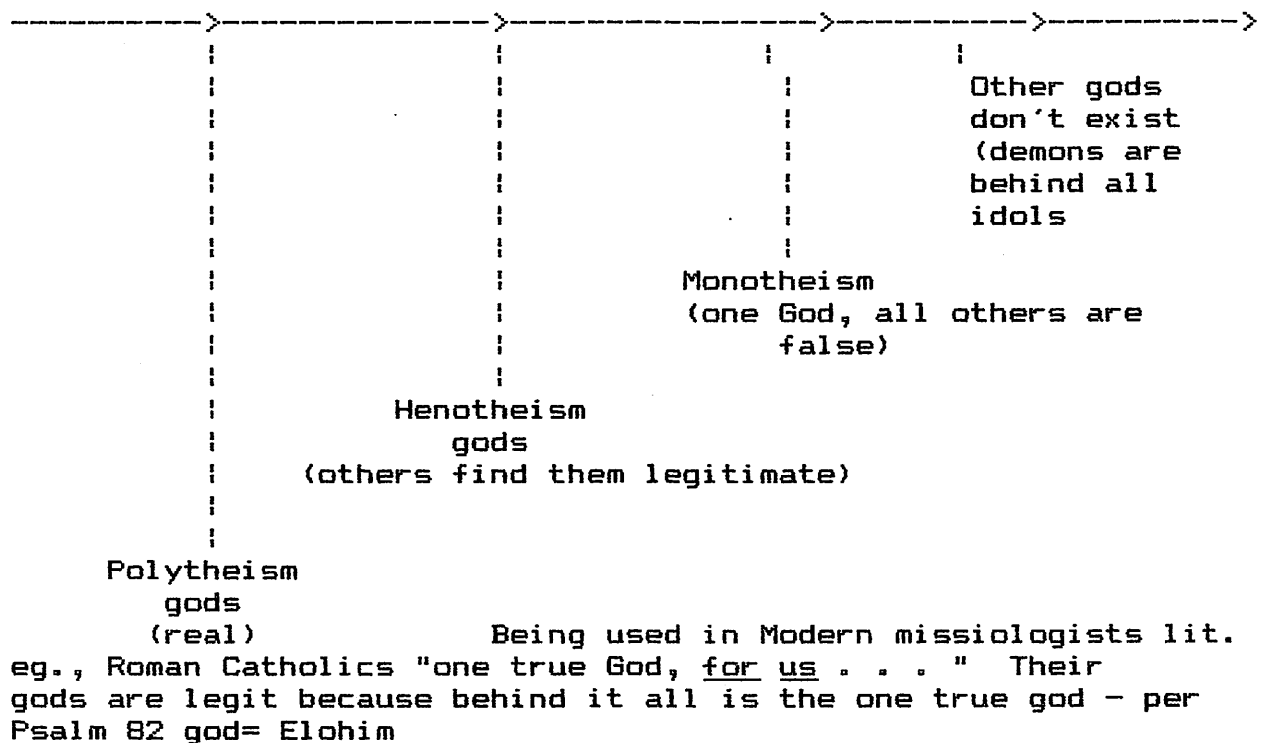
"syn/kretizein" greek
with/criticize - judge
"to combine" mix.

1. religion --> outside it's environment
|
|
new culture
new lords
new thought-forms
contextualize! (not syncretism) eg. Greek culture - "theos"
2. take on ideas/practices/distort original---form over content
3. no revelation is unique! Many ways to reach transcendence,
all formulations are inadequate, therefore harmonize! Mix!
one universal religion
||
\\
illegitimate blending of religions

###

1/07/85

DEFINITION:
"Henotheism"



Hartenstein: Jesus challenges all religion
Barthian position --> end of WWI - criticism of sloppy liberalism
-- back to Biblical Theology.

Starkey > read
Kristen Stendahl

Forman: "pluralism" - Millet system
Islam

Truks: Christians
quarter

Samartha, chapter 1:
1. Listen to be heard
2. larger community facing societal problems

Christology & Christianity

German philosophic circles

Man ----> God <----- Man
"Mensch-lichkeit" (Mankind encounter)

###

1/09/85

Religion of Israel

need for a theme/standard ----> Jesus Christ

Jesus speaking from his background eg., Kingdom of God

OT <------(continuity)-----> NT
but also discontinuity (disagreed- with interp. of OT)
-----> | ----->
Jewish theme
(canon)

"unitarianism of the Second Person of the Trinity" reading Jesus into the OT "Christomonism" Barth
reading NT Concepts into the OT - using Jesus' presuppositions (okay) ----

HOW JESUS FELT ABOUT OTHER RELIGIONS:

1. OT attitude toward other Religions . . .
 - a. Note of hostility, Deut 7:2ff & 5
toward religious practices--
incest/immorality/necromancy/child sacrifice/exclusivism of religion revelation. Isa 40:18; 44:24; 45:5.

- b. Note of Justice/Kindness toward all people- mercy
Amos - fairness to all people (judges Gentiles & Jews)
Isa 56:6 - Foreigners to be received by God. Persian period: things going good - tolerant to others, religious community from political community
Ruth ----> God's mercy to a Moabitess a protest to the religious exclusivism often practiced by the Jews.
Jonah----> ditto (mercy to the Assyrians)

OT: particular always in conflict with the universal
(Israel) vs (Nations)
chosen unity

kindness to those that convert - not to the pagan "Salvation is of the Jews," Jesus in John's gospel.

Missions not really emphasized in the OT --Jews function more or less to be Jews (to be consistent, to be a demonstration of God's covenant relationship) - witness by example, by attraction

- c. God used Gentiles Nations to further his purposes
Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians (used but not approved by God regarding their religious practices).

- d. Universal growing concern for Gentiles

Kaufman's attitude toward OT treatment of Jewish Religion - Bible is silent regarding all of the Mythology, the religious systems of the Gentiles . . . p. 8 slowly starts to challenge religious evolution currently touted. p. 13, sole argument against Paganism is one against the fetishism of worshipping

objects of wood and stone. . . "Prophets ignorant of myths . . ." ignorance on the part of the people of "religion" common among all peoples

[Carl Braaten - Paul Tillich] - the use of the word "salvation", what do you mean? (p. 84), DEFINE TERMS! Hostile to Evangelicalism. Taking to task those on the left and the right, a certain Universalism . . .

###

1/11/85

JESUS CHRIST AND HIS ATTITUDE TOWARD OTHER RELIGIOUS SYSTEM

New Testament Judaism:

Jesus was relatively uninfluenced by 1) Essenses - withdrew
2) Sadducees - rationalis..
3) Hellenists

He was in harmony with the best in the Pharisees (essentially a lay movement: country people of Galilee), he accepted it. Terminology, etc. (canon, etc.)

authority (he claimed the right to judge) and condemned the "Hallakah" (the body of law to protect the Sinaitic law). He was interested in the moral principles and ethical matters, doesn't appeal to legality but originality in using the Scriptures (idea of principles). He claimed to uphold the Sinaitic law but attacked the Hallakah. OT ideals self-expressed in himself, moved out in him, fulfilled in him.

eg., Luke 4:12ff: the inauguration of the Kingdom, the synagogue reading of Isa 61 - judgement of Israel's nationalistic prejudices. The golden age wouldn't happen without the inclusion of the Gentiles. The Good Samaritan and Matt 8 - sitting with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

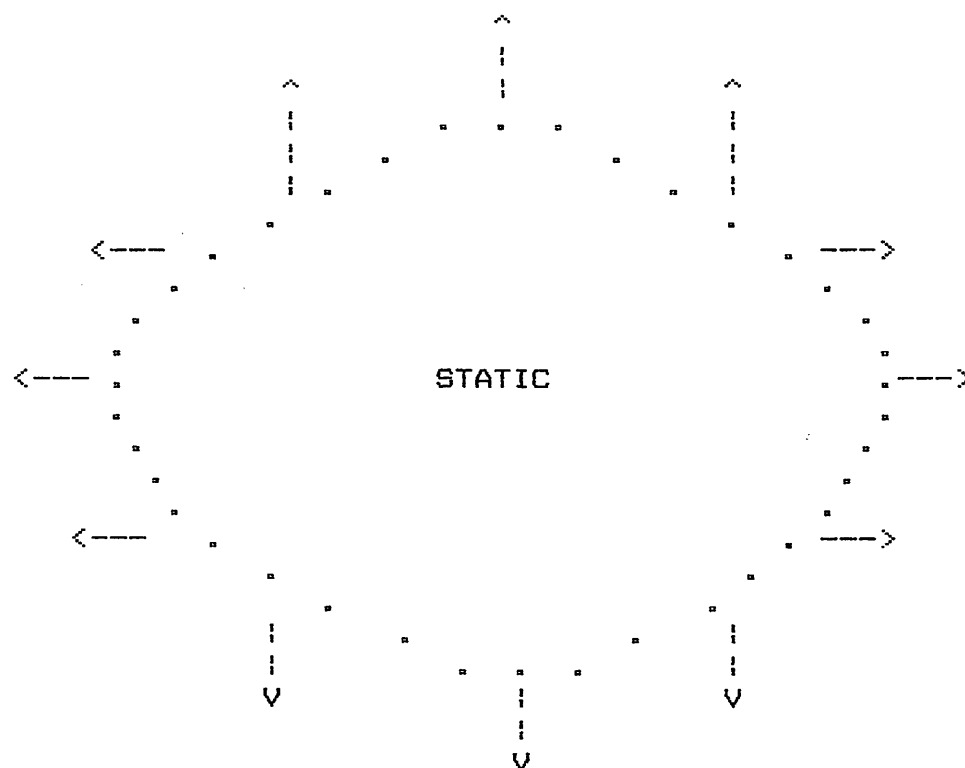
inner spirit outer appearance
motive far more important than the act

He had to have absolutes --- denounced the corruption in Judaism even precepts ascribed to Moses (Mk 12:24).

new wine <----> old wine skins

Did he want an open breach with Judaism? He was well aware of the fact: Truth divides.

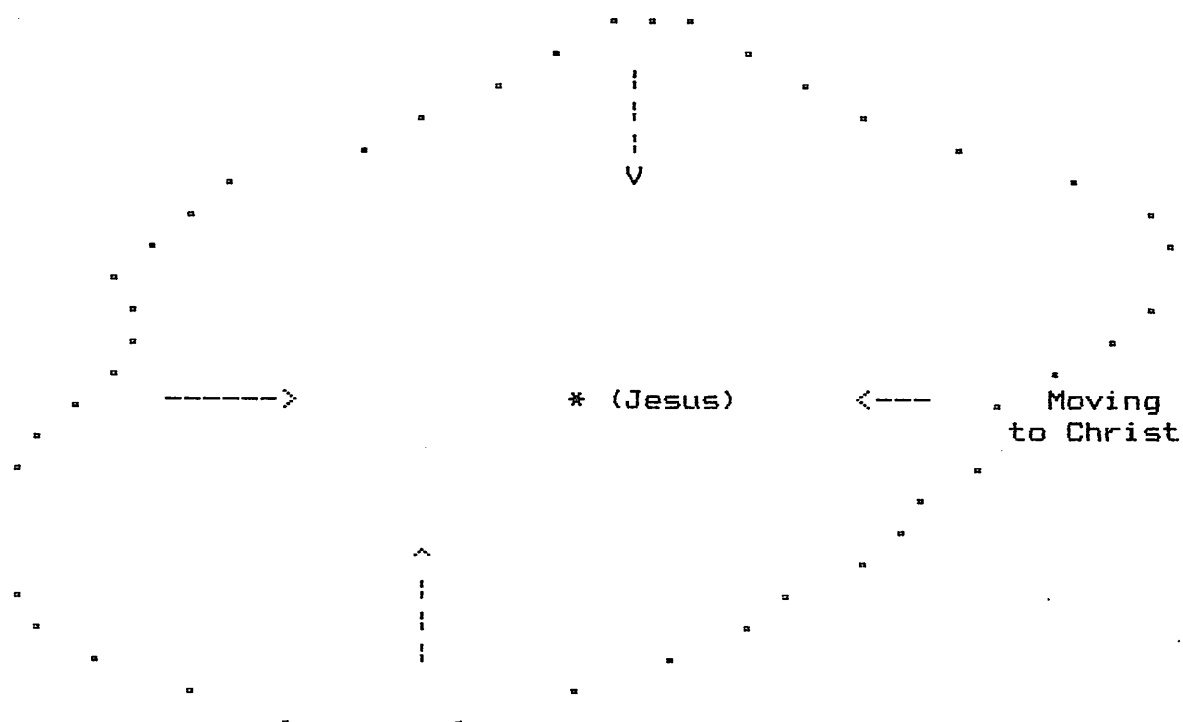
Hebert's Bonded Set (example of American Evangelism)



Holding Doctrines:

- a. -----
- b. -----
- c. -----
- d. -----
- z. -----

Evangelism then equals moving the wall to take more property. But what's the center?



Land
Jerusalem
Temple
NATION

+
|
+
|
+

UNIVERSAL

JESUS' ATTITUDE TO NON-JEWISH RELIGION

Samaritans:

One God, Moses, Pentateuch, Judgement, Call to Renewal, Worship at Mt. Gerazim.

- to the Jews they were considered half-breeds, a mongrel race. Jesus condemned Jew's attitude - he stressed neighborliness. eg., John's gospel, the women at the well:
1) He goes against the Hallakah - talking to a woman & drinking water, but he doesn't tolerate the woman's religion - Jesus wouldn't have said "All religions are the same, have the same validity."

2) the Samaritan Issue, ". . . Sheep from another fold."

Rome didn't interfere with religion (Emperor worship didn't take place until later), Jesus didn't seem to have had contact with other religions - broad base for universal brotherhood. Jesus' response to Pluralism would be the Great Commission.

The Jews rejected Jesus (intolerant to non-Jews)

Jesus believed in common grace. Natural acts of Human Kindness - impact of something within the human heart - a bit of the "Imagio Dei" - acceptable by God - but doesn't bring salvation.

Matt 11:27 - Exclusive call

Luke 10:22 - All things delivered to Jesus

John 14:6 - "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life, no one comes to the Father but by me."

Apostles repeat this exclusive call.

###

1/14/85

Review of Robi's chapel talk of last week:

yoga is interested in more than exercise.

exercise - mental - religion

reciting the "montra" by
Robi is not scriptural -
Matt 6:7-8.

Chapter 5 of Samartha:

The author tends to believe the Holy spirit is introducing Jesus Christ p 66. The author doesn't mention "common grace" at all. All human beings bear something of the Image of God

Emotional Rational

"THRONE"

Will to Act

Our conscience can be strong or weak.
 " " standard must come from the work of God.

	V	V	V
	conscience	history	nature
God appears			Christian comes
in three		with revelation
general ways	. . .		of Christ.
	. . . Heart of man		
	" "		
	. new religious forms, but		
suppress in bottom of the heart of non-Christian.			

Lecture title: The Practice of the Apostles

- 9

2. Problem of Comparative Religions:
Ezekiel: Zenopians said, "Why so many different forms of Religion?" He feels diversity doesn't mean error. It just means complexity of Truth. Thus, no religion has the right to claim a monopoly on Absolute truth.

3. The Finality of Christ:
Acts 4:12 and John 14:6

2 Concepts

JESUS OF NAZARETH

humanity

began in time element

JESUS CHRIST THE CHRIST

"Cosmic Christ" used today

1 Cor 10:1-4

Eph. 4:17-20

"The Larger Christ"

- * made no suggestion of any other way
- * called the pagans to abandon their idols Acts 14:10ff
- * unity of mankind - the human race is one
- * no barriers between people, but units.
- * no religious distinctions between us
- * Paul called to abandon the idols Acts 14:10ff, ch. 17 & 19
- * Divine mercy extended to all.
- * only one true Israel - the Church!
- * Christ Jesus is Supreme

other religions:

- * do have gods but don't really exist 1 Cor 8:1-6 especially v 4
- * the presence of demons behind other religions and gods 1 Cor 10:20 (Paul took demons very seriously)
- * Religions are so corrupt, have nothing to do with them (2 Cor 6:14-23; separation from temple defilement).
- * Paul doesn't say that in other religions none of God's care, people suppress truth.
- * Acts 14:17 the Living Lord has not left Himself without a witness; Rom 2:11, response to the Truth!

###

1/18/85

chapter 7 of Samartha:

The Lordship of Jesus Christ and Religious Pluralism

He is Teacher & Lord ---> TRUTH (we have to accept him as both teacher and Lord!)

Our Opinions <---> His Opinion:

1. Divine Judgement
2. Fallenness of Humankind
3. Sin
4. Existence of Evil

The true disciple of Jesus and the struggle with Truth.

MK 12 "wrong . . . very wrong" to religious leaders
Jesus is the Praxis of Truth. The issue on the part of the
Christians is not an attitude of arrogant superiority but of
TRUTH. C.S. Lewis said the Truth leads to exclusions

1. Several answers to the question
2. Can't homogenize religions together - they are mutually
exclusive.

Jesus' response to religious pluralism ---> The Great
Commission!

###

1/23/85

"logos" (Samartha p 86)
pre-Christian use - Greek
 - Hebrew

Greeks thinking about the Ultimate:

"logos" - reason (thought) (subjective)
 - word (objective)

"ratio" and "oratio"

God - can't have God with thought, therefore thought is as
eternal as God.

all is in change . . . What holds it all together?

not water

not air

it must be Fire then,

therefore Fire is "logos" and "logos" is God

God = intelligent/power

matter --> eternal

ideas ---> come from God interacting with people in the
material world. Behind everything is the "logos
spermatikos" (the seminal idea - principle).

Hebrews thought that God made himself known through his Word.

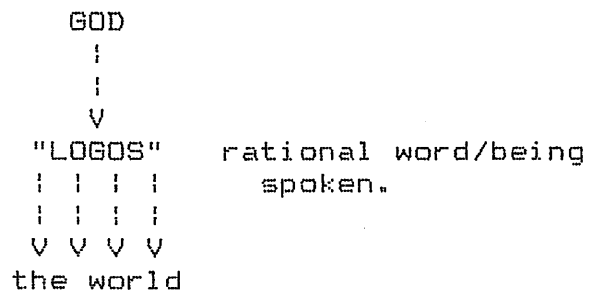
"dabar" (word)

Isa 6:5; Ps 107 --> instrument of judgement, creation,
healing.

A synthesis of the Greek and Hebrew ideas developed
under Philo, an Alexandrian Jew. He lived from 25 BC to 45
AD. He wrote a commentary on Genesis and Question and
Answer book of Genesis and Exodus and a book on the Laws of
the Pentateuch. He employed a very allegorical style. He
used the word "logos" over 1300 times. He is called the
first theologian with a missionary zeal.

re: "logos"

mediating agent between God and man = revelation/word (Heb)
 " " " " " " " " reason/mind



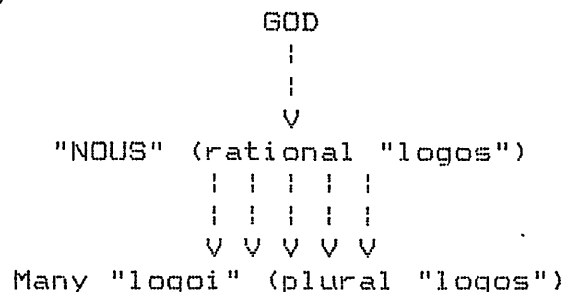
"If the "logos" instrument of God must be different from God and the world but so related, then it must be the 1st born of God, the image of God, the Son of God, etc."

"logos" - image of God, Son of God
 - personal ?

In Philo greek philosophy almost stood at the door of the Church.

Christian use of "logos" (John's gospel) = perfect revelation of God in Jesus Christ. He is personal and concrete. Paul doesn't use "logos" (Paul wrote before John).

The Gnostic movement took the Rational "logos" and elevated it beyond the "word":



The Gnostics wanted to get behind the many "logoi" to the one "nous" (a higher plane of spirituality . . .)

Origin and the "Logos spermatikos" (Truth). He wrote that in all of the Hellenists' writings there was evidence of the "logos spermatikos" in them.

The "logos" was the Achilles heel of the early Church. It wouldn't have anything to do with Hellenistic or Greek or Roman culture but had a weakness for using greek methods of philosophy. They were in awe of greek philosophy (but it couldn't change men).

From the time of the Pentecost to 313 AD (Constantine) a hard line was developing in the Church (toward non-Christians).

Forces against the Church: * the Jews
* the State (Trajan 94-119)
* Pagan Philosophy/worship

The role of the Jewish community within the Church:

- * dominance of the Jews (48 AD)
- * equality with the Jews (until 135 AD)
- * dominance of Gentiles (until the present)

The Reactions to Persecution:

- * no yielding to idolatry
- * hardening of hostility to civil religion
- * challenge and response to Philosophy

Christians took a very negative view of Pagan religions.

###

1/25/85

The New Testament as an anti-Semitic book.

the prejudice is based on the gospel of John (R. Bultmann accused of Anti-Semitism, re John's gospel).

The Gospels (the New Testament for that matter) were written within the context of Judaism (the situations, writers, problems, etc.)

1. Jews can say things about Jews that Gentiles can't
2. "Passion Theology" - innocent suffering, righteous suffering was an on-going theme from the OT onward. Jesus was the perfect example of this among the Jews.
3. Jesus, the righteous one was scorned and derided by the Gentile - in Pilate's palace - severe shaming by Roman soldiers to Jesus. He was the victim of anti-Semitism not the protagonist.

The New Testament is unsympathetic to unbelieving Jews, just like the OT! He wasn't against the Jews, but unbelieving Jews - the false Jews who betrayed their Messiah, the leaders of the Jews outwardly but not inwardly.

John's use of the word "Jews" equals the synoptic gospels "Pharisees." By the time John's gospel was written the Pharisees, who had been one among many of the Jewish parties (less powerful than the Sadducees), had become in essence Judaism (i.e., the representation of Judaism following 70 AD).

The Jews rejecting of Jesus did not express their Jewishness but was in itself a rejection of it.

Paul's use of the word "Jews" in 1 Thess 2:14-16, was equivalent to John's use (i.e., "Jews" = Pharisees).

chapter 6 of Samartha:

p 83 re: cultural revolution, they thought it was bringing about the Kingdom of God without the King. The quote of

C.S. Song is a good example of outsiders trying to understand what was going on inside China. Later the Chinese said, "You're crazy!" to all of this.

Newbigin: Proclamation but no persuasion. He forgets about "Making Disciples."

- * no intimation of Final Judgement (separation)
- * implicit Universalism.

###

1/28/85

1910 - Missionary Debates in Edinborough England. Respect all religions - knowledge and charity.

How the Hard Line Developed:

The transition from 315 AD to 700 AD

In 315 Constantine made Christianity the official state religion. It was an alliance with the State, to use political power to suppress paganism. The Church was not willing (council of Nicea), turned to the State, and the people were not willing to join the Church.

In 375 the Roman gov't stopped subsidizing Paganism. So there had been 2 generations of uncertainty. During this time Christianity was generally not practiced by the emperors, the farmers, the aristocrats, or the intelligentsia. It was popular only among the urban dwellers and the slaves. this was a period of generosity and tolerance with immorality checked by the gov't.

After Julian the Apostate's attempt to throw Christianity out, the Church said, "let's get paganism out of the Roman Empire once and for all!" And the Christians then started to persecute. In 391 Theodosius develops the idea that the "enemies of God are the same as the enemies of the state." Anti-heretics . . . Christians that deviate for the Roman line.

From 400 to 1200 the missionary movement were undertaken by the "heretical" Christians (in Rome's eyes). From 395 on the Church was more intolerant of "heretical" Christians than the other religions. Lesson from Church history: something grows and a scapegoat is pointed out.

↓
↓
315 Bitter vs. Roman persecution
395 Bitter vs. Christian heretics
↓
↓

Christianity & Islam

- * History of polemics ("all we've done is argue with them")
- S - "Islam is a corruption"
- T - "Bible vs. Quran"
- A - "Muslim view Christianity ---> worship of Images."
- T
- I
- C "failure = to see any good in Islam."

* Positive

- Person of Jesus
- concern for the Holy
- Healing through Jesus
- Sin --> depravity
- Dream

Two Voices from the Middle Ages:

- St. Dominic:
reason/orderly presentation/ persuasion . . .
- St. Francis:
Love/tears/example . . . then persuasion.

The Crusades - the origin is obscure!

- * pilgrims --> protection
- * force - anti-heretics
 - anti-excommunicants
- * Pope: Christians fighting Christians [the knights]

"Actual" reason: hope to mend the Church

Pope: -----> Greeks <----- Seljik Turks

Western Eastern

Church Church

Gregory VII (+ vassal states)

1095 Urban II = help brothers in the East and to "Free Jerusalem." Mobs left terror while heading for Constantinople - "Judenhotze" liquidated Jewish towns along the Rhine.

1099 Jerusalem occupied by the Crusaders.

Ramon Lull (1236-1316 AD)

"Many knights do I see who go to the Holy Land thinking to conquer it by force and arms. But when i look at the end thereof all of them are spent without attaining that which they desire. Wherefore it appears . . ." Studies Centers for Missionary Studies - Brutish with learning.

###

1/30/85

Kraemer: "theology of Religion began with the Reformation."

The Reformation: "A tragic necessity."

The Great Themes:

- * Authority - sola scriptura

- * gospel - Grace
- * Priesthood - all are 1st class citizens, Christ our priest.

Factors:

- * desperate shortage of preachers - few knew scriptures. (reason for no large missionary movement)
- * struggle for survival (home mission)
- * lack of contact with non-Christian world (Roman Catholics ruled the seas).
- * until the 17th century --> sea (colonial powers) no contact.
- * all mission orders (among the Roman Catholics) must be wrong - eliminated by the Reformers.

THEY WERE HANDICAPPED BY AN IGNORANCE OF THE WORLD OUTSIDE AND PREOCCUPIED WITH THEIR OWN SURVIVAL.

Luther - the Preacher of the Reformation
Calvin - the Theologian of the Reformation

Luther:

He had had a tremendous experience of faith and judged everything by his experience. Therefore he took a very dim view of all religions. Anything that attempted to establish union with God was WORKS! "Catholics, oh they're like the Turks!" In 1542 he published Brother Richard's Refutation of the Koran, he had a copy of the Koran in Latin. "Turks" was a swear word for him. He knew enough about the Koran to recognize its truth - & its errors . . .

He dismissed all religion. Pope --> Anti-Christ.
Turks --> Satan incarnate.

Young Luther: How To Deal Gently With the Jews. Jews didn't turn to the gospel. Walter Holsten, 1970 Lutheran missiologist and Luther's later track, "Schriften Wider den Juden", (Writing Against the Jews).

Four Themes in the tract:

- * God's wrath --> on the Jews (only God can lift it).
- * Jews resisted conversion.
- * Judaism is essentially anti-Christian.
- * A Christian who opposes Reformation become as Jews who think by works . . .

Wm. L. Shirer: The Rise & Fall of the Third Reich, "they acted on Luther's program . . ." Wagner's music - German mythology . . .

Calvin:

. Judgement

ISRAEL -----> . The Church ----->
promise .

"All religions evidence of human fallenness"
"sensus divinitatus" book I chapter III paragraph 1
I-III-3 "cannot remove the fear of God - sense of the divine
- to shake off the image of God but can't" - if you don't
respond to sense of the divine -> you'll be corrupted.
Therefore there is no people without religion!

Seminal religion - if one doesn't respond then the seed
spoils I-IV-4 "the result is religious fabrication."

The Source of the Knowledge of God "revelatis generalis"
Natural revelation - history/world/conscience/nature itself.
This "does no good - the Human heart suppresses the truth."
I-V-4

"Man is without excuse." I-V-15

the origin of idols - "the human mind is a perpetual forge
of idols." I-XI-8

People need spectacles to see - i.e., the Bible.

Zwingle (1484-1531)

influenced by tradition of humanism, "true religion"
(Protestantism verses Roman Catholicism) . . .
philosophers, et al, in heaven.

17th century ---> The Period of the Enlightenment, "Aufklarung",
rejection of supernaturalism, natural religion . . .

True religion hides beneath the foggy layers of all the
religions of the world . . .

a precursor of liberalism
revolt vs. revelation.

###

2/1/85

The 18th century: The Enlightenment and John Wesley.

The Enlightenment:

European culture seemed to attain a point where it no longer
needed Christianity. G.E. Lessing's drama "Nathan der
Weise" (Nathan the Wise), he has three sons (typifying a
Christian, a Muslim, and a Jew), passes down his gold ring
to one of his sons and two copies to the other two. But
none know which ring is the real ring and which ones are the
copies. ". . . Not the truth he think he has but the truth
he lives . . ." Conserve religious values!

John Wesley (1725, at the age of 22):

He was a cleric of the Church of England, reading Thomas A'

Kempis, Teaching plus acting as Apostles (preaching where Christ is not known), missionary to Georgia. True religion of the Heart (Victory over sin/peace in his heart). Came to faith at Elders gate chapel.

Wesley's List:

* Christian (Western)	"Leave the heathen with him who
* Orthodox (Eastern)	created them, don't pronounce
* Islams	them as damned"
* Pagans/Indians.	Key= changed lives!

###

2/4/85

Development of Enlightenment period - 18th century

Leibniz 1646-1716 philosopher-

(he had read the Jesuit Letters - the missionary newspaper of the day). He thought, "We ought to have the chinese teach us . . ." Natural religion, beginnings of the "Noble Savage" idea (developed later by Russo).

Schopenhauer 1788-1860 bad tempered pessimistic philosopher -

He read the Upanishads - Hindu scripture - "Most sublime literature to be found anywhere on the earth." Preoccupied with non-Christian ideas, "They produced better people," he said. (Later became a Nihilist).

Schleiermacher 1768-1834 - another philosopher (religious)

Challenged Rationalism.

His mother was a Moravian (so he was exposed to Pietism - had a Moravian Experience [Born-again?] as a youngster). Later he face the Rationalism of the University . .

A gist of Schleiermacher's thought:

- defense of religion
- limitation of rationalism
- he brought about the subversion of Biblical Christianity.

[RELIGION]

-emotions

-feelings

-constraints

[UNIVERSITY]

reason

intellect

+

he felt we had to reject Scholasticism with its supernaturalism and mysticism . . .

developed a religious pantheism ---> Reden - defended religion: we are religious beings - not Christianity specifically, it's the best of . . . [he couldn't deny his religious experience as a boy]

Religion is a feeling of absolute dependence on a higher principle. [Therefore, sin is not to be true to ones

feelings . . .]

RELIGION:

- 1) must have a place in our hearts
 - 2) serves a purpose in society.
- Just Christianity? "No!" Each serves it's purpose in the heart (religious feeling) and society, therefore Buddhist serves the Buddhist society . . . etc.

Ernst Troeltsch 1865-1923

"History of Religions" ---> check out the absolute claims of Christianity. Evolution of religions - growing popularity of Evolution (the general theory). Sentimental thought: Christianity is the best, i.e., Nicest. (Best for us in the Western Culture).

Gustav Warneck 1910

Challenged Troeltsch. loved Christ, man of his generation: "Cultural Mandate," missions can be a civilizing force - education, medicine, development. Evangelism + Civilization.

University of Halle (center of Pietism)

-Warneck

- ?

-Lehman

World Parliament 1893

on religions, reaction to materialism (boasting, prosperity)
- associated with the Columbia Expositions.

All religions invited except Baptist, Anglicans, and Russian Orthodox.

Borrows, Presbyterian, Chairman of a central committee:

THEMES:

- brotherhood
- Light from One, for all
- World peace

ATMOSPHERE:

- tolerance
- familial love
- "have we not all one Father . . . ?"

Speculative papers followed by Applications.

Steven Neill, in his book Christian Faith and Other Faiths, (recently reprinted by IVP), records goings on at World parliament. Note one Swami Vivekananda 1863-1902, a disciple/representative of the thought of Ramakrishna 1834-1886. Ramakrishna felt he must practice every religion (major?) for a time (systematically) as part of his True faith.

UNITY -----> Pantheism

(each religion a facet (truth within the core of each religion)

Swami Vivekananda promoted one of the greatest religious myths of the 19th century: the Mystic East/Material West dichotomy.

Gandhi - hindu reformer (eliminate "pagan" elements, eg., the role of sacrifice and the caste system, and synthesize "higher" aspects of other religions; but remain true to ones religion, eg., Hinduism).

###

2/6/85

Ecumenical Movement:

Edinburgh

Asia (mission societies) -->	1	Peace
cooperation (in the mission fields) -->	1	progress
home mission --->	9	world religions
overseas problems (method) --->	1	in decline
student volunteer movement --->	1	western culture
student Christian movement --->	1	& worldwide
	0	optimism

(there was no hint that WWI would begin in 1914)

The speediest occupation of all unoccupied [missionary] fields"

- * no doctrine - the strategy: native workers and (as an
- * no practice - after thought) the unity of the church.

It is thought that this conference was to have launched the Ecumenical movement - NO! It symbolized the emergence of the Ecumenical movement.

The WCC was brought about by two men:

Mott and Hitler ---> "plight of the Confessing Church"

!
V

^
!

he drove people together.!

The churches outside of Germany helping the church inside. It established a pattern of cooperation that developed in the 1930's and was jelled by the formation of the WCC in 1948.

THE TIMES THEOLOGY BIBLE

"CHURCH"

1907 A Letter from the China Inland Mission started the conference of 1910 going:

IRM (International Review of Mission(s) [1911]
Kennedy School of Mission (no defunct)
IMC (International Missionary Council) [1921-2] (formed by
American and British and Continental missions)

↓
↓
↓
↓
↓

WORLD WAR I

Missions didn't do so well in WWI, too much nationalistic drum beating.

After 1910:

in the Christian West,
WWI

the Great Depression

Growing Secularism (eg., emergence of the USSR)

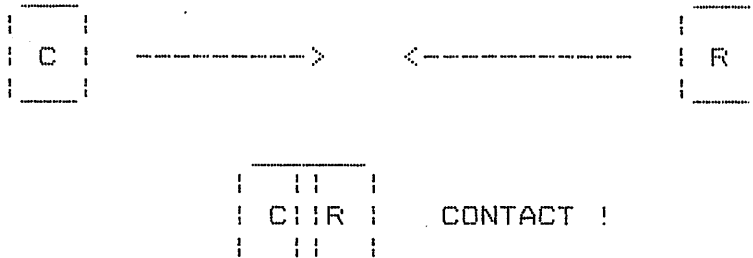
These things discredited the West - there was religious resurgence but not western Christianity. In Germany Barthian theology was growing in popularity (a rejection of Liberalism). In America (which did not suffer the devastation that Europe faced) the Social Gospel was gaining popularity (R. Jones, Hocking) They thought that because of growing secularism we should look at other religions and preserve these "values" ---> emergence of liberalism in America. Laymen's Missionary movement - Hocking

↓
↓

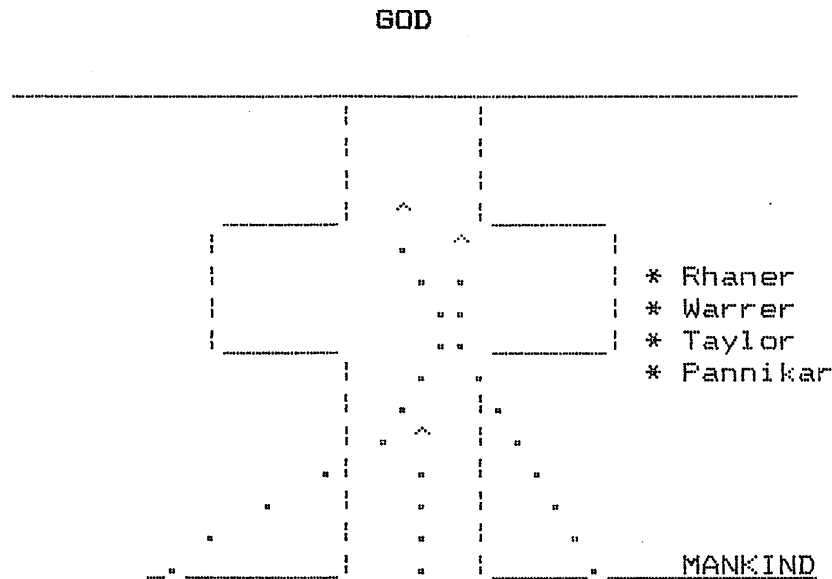
Jerusalem 1928

[1930 - the Wall street crash, laymen's Inquiry: India, China, Burma, Japan, "we ought to be co-workers with other faiths"] This helped the Evangelicals move toward separation and form the International Missionary society.

Theory of Religious Influence

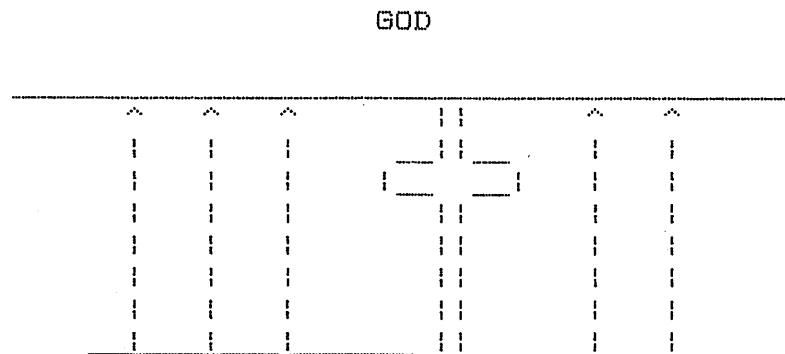


3. Christ in hinduism, the overwhelming grace of Christ (universalist):



- * Ordinary (religions)
("anonymous Christians")
- * Extra-Ordinary (Christianity)

4. Accepted because of or in light of the example of Christ, there is a cooperation of God with other religions (another Universalist theory):



- Speer before Barth
- the negative aspects:
- * assumes the collapse of other religions
 - * Colonialism
 - * religious Christianity (he defends the system)
- the positive aspects:
- * warns against Syncretism
 - * feels there is too much said about the religious values.

###

2/11/85

Kraemer '30s (Reformed) - Barthian, 1928-60
 Knitter '80s (Roman Catholic)

Kraemer held amazing influence, 1938 Tamberam/Midras/'47
 Whitby/'52 Willingan

He was a missionary to Indonesia - mostly academic in his sphere. Kraemer wrote The Christian Message in the Non-Christian World. "Sui generis", in a class by itself. Religious Values in non-Christian religions - between '28 and '38 the Depression, Hitler over Germany (took the Rhineland), Japanese took Manchuria and China, Spanish Civil War . . . The world's future looked dark, Theology turned conservative (everybody was reading their Bibles).

Liberalism of '28

|

∨

Barthianism of '38

<u>God speaks</u>	<u>People</u>	<u>Result</u>
	reject	no religious experience
	accept	religious experience

Therefore where ever you have found religious experience God must have been at work first, therefore there is religious value in other religions.

Kraemer "Jesus Christ is the crises of all religions and empirical Christianity."

*

|

∨

REVELATION + EXPERIENCE

^

|

∨

RELIGIOUS TRUTH IN NON-CHRISTIAN RELIGIONS

Kraemer, "not looking deep enough, eg., The Jews (trained in the Bible, Suffering Servant, etc.) but they rejected the Messiah just like the Hindus in Indian understand and still reject Christ."

1947: Whitby (it was 1910 all over again)

After WWII Renewal and Advance - record of Whitby conference, Call to help us - no ambiguity re: non-Christian religions. Objective: to make all nations disciples. Preach ---> God alone can convert.

*** The Call was never heard!

1948: THE WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES!

In that year it was established. Churches getting together --> everyone was interested, Carl Barth was very prominent at the opening festivities. There were big hopes. WCC has always been thought to be liberal, but at the opening

meetings there was a strong call to Preach!
1948: the Nazis had been stopped
the Japanese " " "
India and China had become states
Eastern Europe had been annexed by the USSR
They hoped for peace.

1952: Willingan: Missions Under the Cross.
Kraemer influenced; there was a negative situation though:
limited objectives, unsure future, but Evangelical
affirmations.

[Barth: Take the Bible seriously, even though it's a *human book*]

'60s: Bultmann: turning away from Christ as the savior of human
race . . . radicalism (liberalism)

Missio Dei, "the mission of God" Trinitarian call. They
slowly took this term and poured different meanings into it.
The Mission of God became whatever God does he does through
other religions also, Hinduism, etc.

###

2/13/85

Newbigin: doesn't recognize an assurance of salvation.
Assurance of Salvation (Future Consequences)
1 John 5:13: Attitudes "Are you in Christ?"
* God [not fear but trust]
* Sin [abhorrence . . .]
* Righteousness [hunger]
* People of God [at home with]
* World [a stranger to]

J. Bunyan "Grace abounding to the Chief Sinner."

Stott:
good preaching = dialogical
|
all oral utterances!

Campbell:
The Idea of "covenant" in the OT & NT
Israel and the Church, Continuity and Discontinuity.
Jeremiah 31 & Hebrews 8: New & Old Covenant:
THE NEW COVENANT
It was needed, Heb 8:7,8 - there was no provision for
deliberate sin.
It was promised, Heb 8: 8.9
It was described, Heb 8:10-12
* a deeper REVELATION (Law in the heart)
* a higher PRIVILEGE (possessed by God; personal
relationship)
* a fuller KNOWLEDGE (the Knowledge of God)

* a greater BLESSING (entire forgiveness)

OT Jer 31

Israel Israel & Judah -> universal application (because of the personal implications of the "Law in the heart")

ROMAN CATHOLICISM & PLURALISM

Xavier Rynne Vatican Council II. Farrar, Straus, Girouz, Inc., 1962, 63 (pseudonym).

During the '20s theologians started to look into the writings of Carl Barth and there developed a ferment to read the Scriptures. Pope John XXIII thought that it would be good to have a council of the whole church and went to the church theologians to see what should be considered. They came back with long lists of issues needed to be discussed. He said that that was too complicated, he wanted to develop this along the simple lines of Christianity. The Cardinals said "No! It would take too long to organize, etc."

You can't talk about other religions without dealing with the Jews and you can't deal with the Jews without dealing with the past . . . Cardinal Bea, The Church and the Jewish People, Harper and Row.

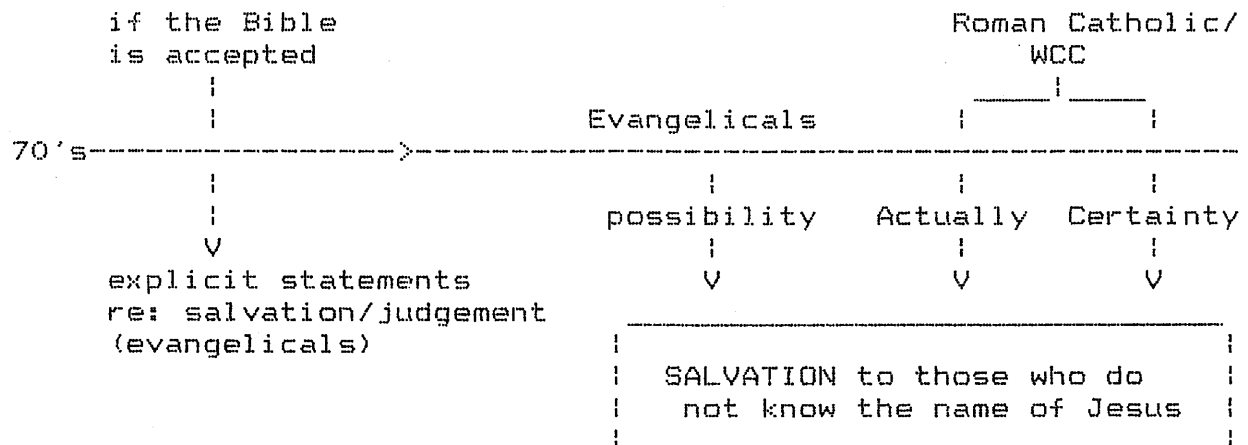
* The Jews said that if you're going to talk about us then you must:

1. Stress the ties between the Jews and Christians
2. Deny the charge that the Jews killed Christ (deicide)
3. Extinguish the flames of Anti-Semitism.

The Play, "The Deputy" - the Pope was silent when he knew that Jews were being stuffed in Nazi ovens.

###

2/20/85



Universalism

if it's true, then our focus should be on this present age, on this life.

A heresy blasted by the early church

1) Inadequate evidence and reasoning.

2) Failure to understand the traditional position on the facts of salvation and Judgement and Heaven and Hell.

3) Inadequate answers to the questions posed by those who reject universalism!

4) Universalism cuts the nerves for all moral choices in this life and evangelism.

5) Appeal to unwarranted assumptions:

- * Purgatory

- * God's love excludes the concept of Judgement

- * Mystery (?)

Micheal Griffiths' "Shaking the Sleeping Beauty," The Confusion of the Church and the World.

---> Universalism

- * He doesn't deal with the issue of those that haven't heard!

- ! tenets of universalism

- ! weakness of universalism

- ! refutation of tenets of universalism

an evangelical point of view that is not up to date.

###

2/22/85

- * Continuity

- * Discontinuity Jews & OT ---> the Whole is binding

- * Fulfillment Christian & OT ---> Binding only as seen

- * Evolutionary through Christ.

- * Borrowing

Farquar The Crown of Hinduism Vivikar --> his patchwork reformation is not enough (of Hinduism), the gleams of light do not justify the system.

Joseph Bracken, S.J. Salvation: A Matter of Personal Choice, (a Roman Catholic counter to Universalism)

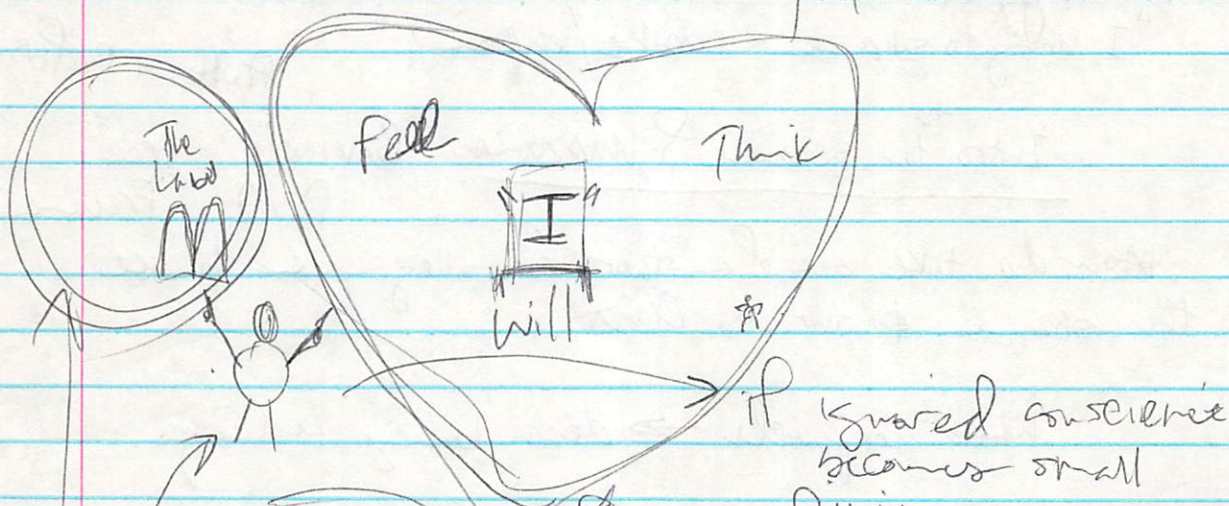
LEAVES OUT: * no exegesis * no Christology * no Cross/redemption * no judgement * no sin (revolt, disobedience, accountability) * NEED FOR GRACE!

THEMES UNDERLINED: * human work/or lack of determinatives * keeping traditional ethics intact/protects traditions

###

not 533 2/25

The Human Personality & Conscience



Conscience is not infallible

looks at standard of the actions of the "I"

"a man/woman is a bundle of Habit."

great big octopus has "I" in control over
Feeling, rational, & volition.

con-science

"Joint knowledge"

our - eidos

word of God [standard of the community].

religious confrontation

Kerygmatic preaching the good news

2 Cor 4:2 open statement of truth

⇒ Conscience

- man anxiety

desire to escape reality

- gospel

Paul's pattern Act 26:18

working from

religious

backgrounds

open-eyes → need

turn - dark/light → Christ

turn - Sita/Christ → Allegiance

receive

→ forgiveness

(baptism)

entering new community

Electrics:

et jxw

"I bring to shame - awake/expose/"

Path. & Reform

Intro to the Science of Missions ^{to} Barnick team.

David Freeman

How do take one of another rel. allegiance to see
the shame & turn to Christ

White corpuscles → death bring healing.

indefinite fight from God (Rom 1)
Ed. of the World

• God → mystery (wise ... "wonderful world &
behind it God")

• God → distance

• God = moral order (cosmic law)

Jews buried God under the law

Sinner

*

Judgment

• God → ~~de~~ depersonalized

mysticism { shoreless
pantheism } being

What have you done w/ God? (John 16)

Christian Kaiser → missionary (German)

Christ's Feast w/ non-X - pile of fruit stamped on to the
ground → dirt of the road → rel. symbol

there comes a time of confrontation (w/ a Call) -

Call - Justice - Life after Death.

Perph talk about God → yes, but is that the God of the bible -
Abraham, Isaac & Jacob

Conversion

In a speech given by David, Bosch, Dr. Glasser gleaned the following notes.

The usual conversion experience is usually broken into three parts:

- 1) Announcement- of what God had done
- 2) Challenge - to repent
- 3) Invitation - enter into the good news : of forgiveness
hope and release

But conversion is more than this. It is:

- a. Traditionally---- individualistic, spiritual, and emotional
- b. a turning from to a turning to
- c. transfer of allegiance, a change of Lords
- d. involving self judgment, losing oneself in self humility, denial
- e. taking journey into the unknown, new movement
- f. a new focal point 2 Cor. 5;17 a new center of relationships
- g. has to do with these things we held dear to our hearts.
- h. a process not finished, never finished.

March 6th

discussion of article from TIME

Paradigm shift..... each religion is a paradigm, believes it has the truth

no two religions ask the same questions

assume that Christianity is just one paradigm

If people challenge some aspect (God, man, judgment, cross, Jesus) than a different paradigm takes place

For examplke, if we were writing a.... theology of missions:

the Reformed would begin at God/ the trinity..... the author of missions

Fundamentalists " Scriptures verbalization " "

Traditional R.C " " the church the instrument " "

Secular theologians " " the world, the poor ... sphere, context "" "

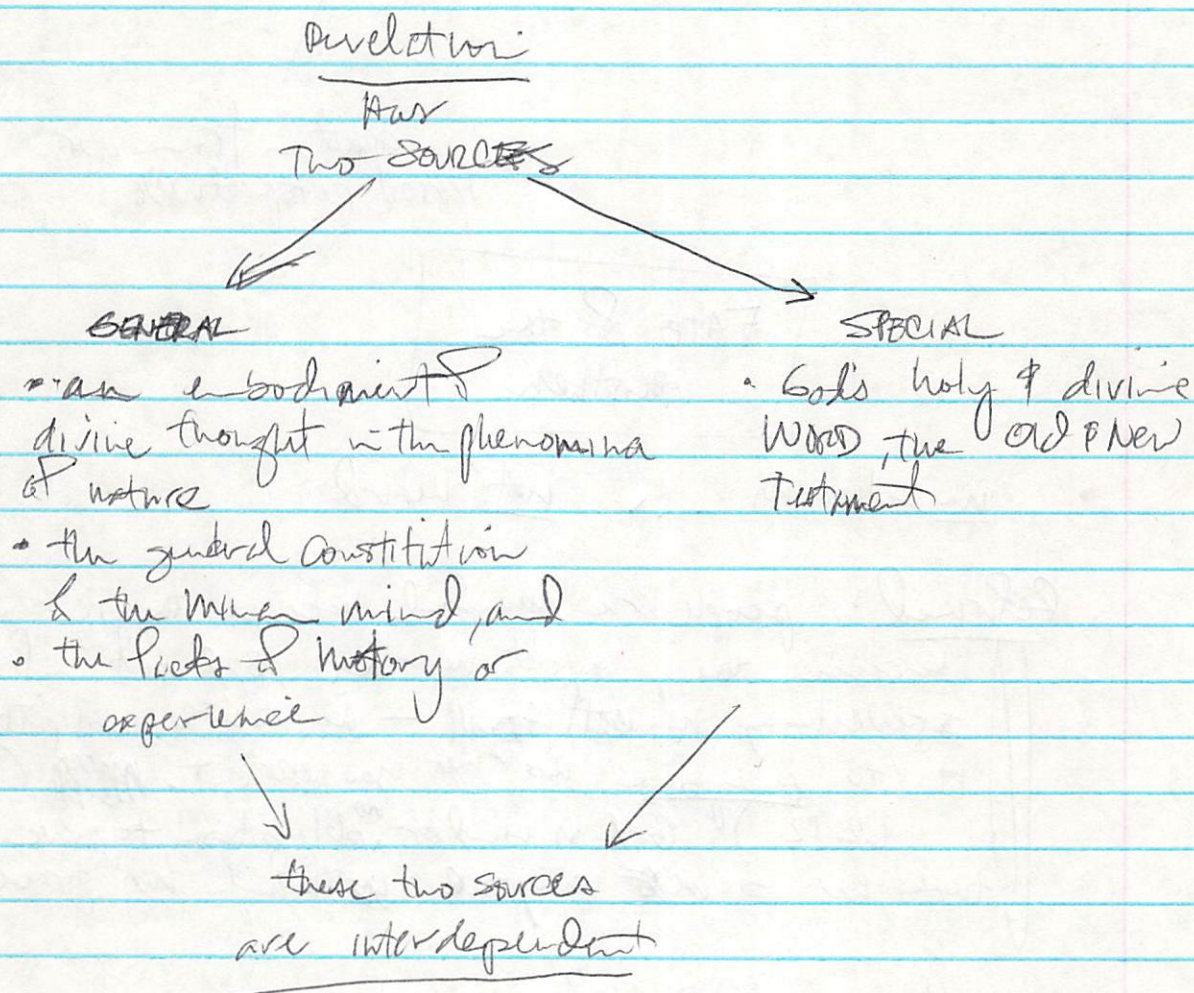
but all need to converge on Jesus Christ

Futher principles essential to Christianity
will begin here on Friday..

3/1/85

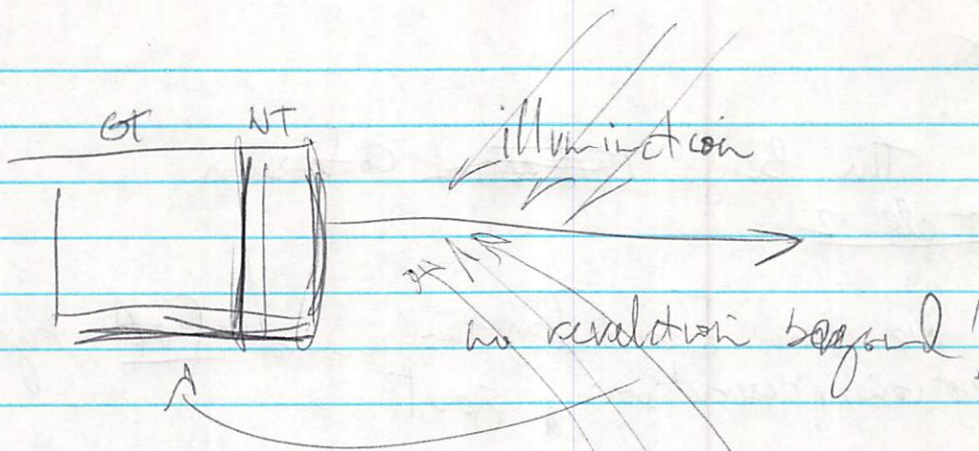
The Belgic ~~Confession~~ Confession
Article 2

We know [God] by two means: first by the creation, preservation, & govt



WE DON'T FOCUS ON ONE ~~SOURCE~~
~ WHEN GOD HAS GIVEN US TWO!

Anthropology → a great deal to offer is valid. & invalid
hermeneutics is the activity of the community w/ the individual
- coming to the text w/ our perspectives to face the
Bible questions ...



question from our
various perspectives

FATE of the
Heathen

we believers ... not heard

Refuted: people are damned because they're sinners ~~not~~
because they haven't heard. God isn't unfair by not
revealing himself to all - he has the obligation to reveal
it to anyone who you seek it. ~~many~~ (Matt 20:1-15;
Lk 12:1) God is under ^{no} obligation to save anyone,
but he ~~saves~~ anyone ~~is~~ through his grace.

10 → 1?

~~from that~~ of ten angels that believe in heaven hardly
one will believe in hell:

- had to ~~struggle~~ hard to stomach
- ~~horror~~ ^{horror}
- Conquest of ~~the~~ ^{the} known
- ~~Askerists~~

... blinking eyes ...
alternat~~el~~ ~~app~~ simulation
extinction

- God
- saved
- Eternal for temporal
punishment • sin

God, Sin, Heaven, Hell.

- don't believe in Hell
— pleasures now → ?
≡
- ethical ~~any~~ compunction
- believe in hell
— conduct now faith

3/4 NTSSS

backward ← + →

Sinners
repentance
Faith
sacrifice

(Ps. 51)

[Sins willfully
committed
pleads for mercy]

Sinners
repentance
Faith
(+)

[David
Abraham
Moses] → (spiritual
experience
the same) →

Paul
John

Romans 2 - Face to Face w/ God's Judgment
→ Jews → Law & Sinai
→ non-Jews → Law on the Hearts

Romans 3
↓

All mankind is deceased
not Rom 10: 33-34 - Cornelius → received God's gospel
man - realizes need, in sin casts himself on God
for mercy ∴ receives mercy. People are not saved

because they understand the statement
but because → Fear of God

→ living up to the ~~light~~ light they have
(confess themselves as sinners + explore God's mercy)

Rom 1:28-32

Reformed all sinners are judged

GRASSER all unrepented sinners are judged.

Lk 18:

Lk 1: 76-77 knowledge of Salvation

Culture -

- truthfulness
- courage
- selflessness

} know of sinner (self
w/ cultural testimony).

(Functional morality)

First Principles

• supremacy of Jesus Christ
(source of the highest truth i.e. God & man)

Normative

= the fact of
other fact

teaching of

Christ ↓

teaching of

→ God is living, personal

→ God is righteous, loving

→ Human race is one in creation (Imago Dei)
of sin (our sickness
in our heart)

→ Value of the individual

→ Essentiality of dealing in love w/ others

→ Ultimate triumph of Good over Evil Rom (1:32)

MT 533 3/8/85

35 K

10 K6

8 L

5 Jan

5 PM

88525

Vernon Bourd. Model

- comprehensive
- Balanced/Pair.
- brief + homework
- unbiased use of Scripture
- pulls no punches
- Christ grace / love
truth

has compromised w/ tent of the
Christian Faith

w/ \sqrt{PN} \longrightarrow "cosmic
Christ"

(... ~~one~~ Christology ...)

It is not enough ^{to speak about} ~~to speak about~~ the Supremacy of X
(theses): Further principles that are essential to X-ity

- ~~is~~ complete + exhaustive

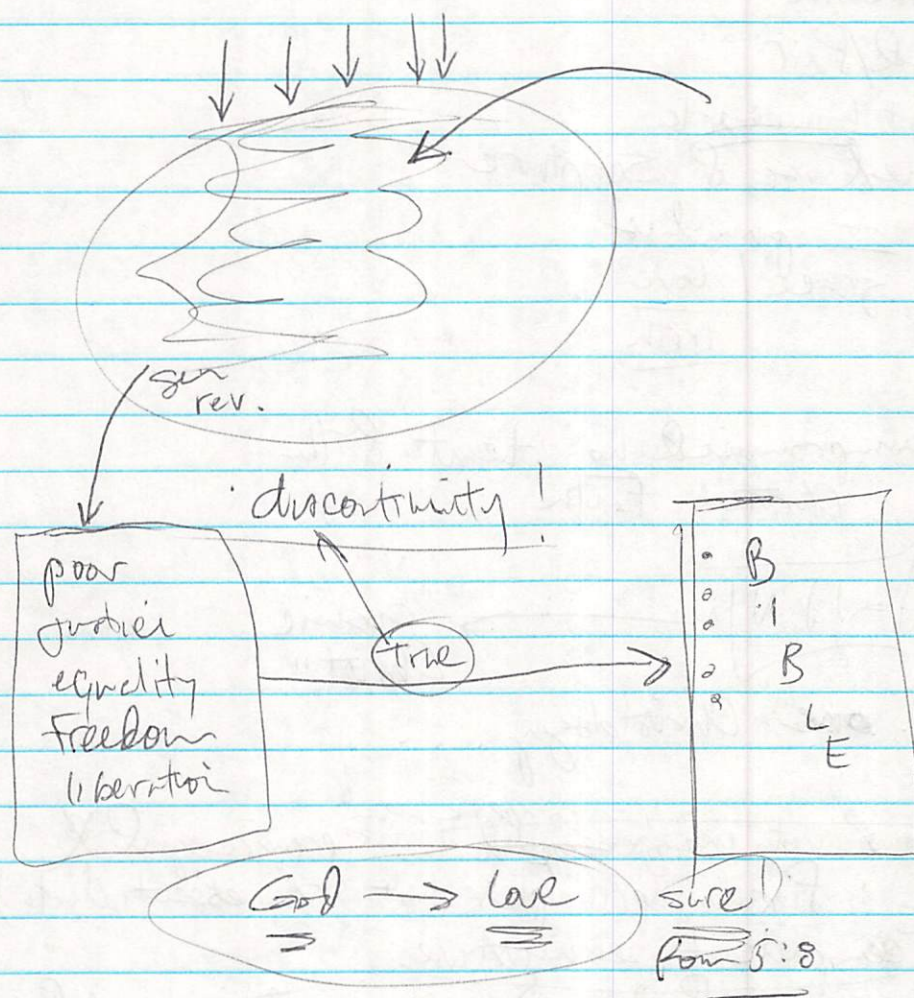
$\lambda\alpha\gamma\alpha\varsigma$ = perfect in the incarnation by definition resulting
in something

- Is it final + absolute

scripture "F. event can only happen once." Brother
letter of Faith (all other ^{religions} speak in these terms)

no other religion can
replace rev. of God in Christ

- Is H "exclusive" + "entirely other"?
Innovation & rev. so different from all other
religion, religions, knowledge



- Revelation as Bible

(in)

- inerrancy/infallibility debate

• Response

• tolerance / openness

Jesus not ↓ to sin / unbelief / Christian
exclusiveness

truth doesn't often enter the debate

• Impartiality - impossible w/ debate w/ the
exclusive Xa claims

|| (Reason = man) return argument provide reason
& not rev. ...

→ appreciate each experience

* Church → extension of the Incarnation
→ inseparable from the Gospel
true but

Roman Catholicism

→ Samaritan

p 148/9 are truth claim set up against another truth
claim

bear witness → not out to impose Islam

Spirit & truth → exposure to scriptures

⊕ → Glosser School of world
mission

Who are THE FATHERS OF THE CHURCH?

ST. JUSTIN MARTYR

Acclaimed as the greatest early defender of Christianity, Justin was born about AD 100 in Jordan. Raised as a pagan and trained in pagan philosophy, he became a professional teacher of that subject, traveling all over the Middle East. Justin's razor sharp mind analyzed every known philosophy and became convinced of the truth of Christianity at the age of 32. He spent the next 33 years of his life traveling and teaching Christian principles. His famous *First Apologia* refutes the State's charge that Christians were atheists and political subversives and argues for the positive effects of Christianity and its high moral code.

Justin recognized the importance of non-Christian writings and was the first in a long line of philosophers who sought to reconcile Christian and pagan cultures. For his trouble he was denounced to the authorities and ceremonially murdered in Rome.

ST. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM

John's beautiful sermons explore the Gospel in minute detail. He meticulously questions Jesus's actions, works and motives with the demanding inquisitiveness of a skeptic, and with the insight and understanding of a man thoroughly familiar with the spirit and letter of the scriptures. John urged a Christian morality aimed toward attainment of peace of mind and self control and his work stands as an excellent aid for clarifying and understanding the Gospel and for building a strong moral code based on Christian principles.

TERTULLIAN

Like so many early Christian intellectuals, Tertullian was born into a pagan family and converted to Christianity only when he was a mature man and had given 38 years of thought to the subject. The legal training he had received permeated his style of writing, and helped him to explain Christian principles in unmistakable terms. His famous *Adversus Iudaeos* shows brilliantly why the Old Testament must now be interpreted spiritually rather than literally. His words are compelling answers to compelling questions today.

ST. CYPRIAN

Cyprian's life was a true drama of "riches to rags" lived out in a time when being a Christian was a very dangerous business. Born into a wealthy pagan family in Carthage, he received the classical education required of upper class sons. At the age of 46 he converted to Christianity, adopted a vow of chastity, sold most of his property, and gave his money to the poor. Two years later he became Bishop of Carthage. Cyprian advocated independence of judgment for bishops and did not hesitate to disobey nor even to attack the Pope when he disagreed with him. His letters speak to men today as they did in his own times, offering encouragement to the weak and exhorting all Christians to remain united, following the precepts of Jesus in all things. Predictably, these sentiments cost him his life.

ST. GREGORY OF NYSSA

Gregory explored the nature of man, and his thought on this subject contains a fascinating blend of ideas that are found today in the very different cultures of East and West. His timely synthesis of opinion on Man's nature and his mysticism make St. Gregory of Nyssa's works particularly interesting reading today, in light of the popular interest in the mystical and the spiritual.

ST. BASIL

Among the first Fathers to assert the values of Greek literature in the education of Christian youth, Basil proposed that youth must be allowed to select from non-Christian ideas those which benefited them and to reject those which contradicted Christian beliefs. Although dedicated to the ascetic life, Basil believed that excesses in asceticism were to be avoided and that charitable works were of greatest importance. Practicing what he wrote, Basil supported hospitals and hostels and was well known and loved for his Christian good works. His writings remain an inspiration to charity today.

ST. AMBROSE

At the age of 26, Ambrose was practicing law in the praetorian prefect's court and five years later he was a provincial governor at Milan. A very dynamic and impressive figure, Ambrose must have been well respected by the people of his province, for when he attended the elections for the Bishop of Milan merely to keep order, the people of Milan proclaimed him their Bishop. In spite of a very pressing life in the corridors of power, Ambrose was always human and never too busy to answer letters from Christians who asked for clarification of Scripture or for help in legal or family matters. His answers to such questions reveal a God of love, not one of vengeance. Ambrose encouraged his fellow Christians to enhance the beauty of their minds by embracing the real treasures of non-material values. His discussion of young men desiring age to escape the rule of their parents, and of old men longing to return to youth presents a timeless irony and advice on how to deal with it: his recommendation is to be content with each stage of life as a natural and necessary part of being alive, and he teaches that happiness is to be found in service to God and fellow man. Ambrose's lucid and beautiful writings speak so clearly to us today that all thoughtful men and women should have access to them.

ST. AUGUSTINE

At the age of 19, Augustine dedicated himself to the search for truth and began a study of the Scripture. He found it difficult to understand and disdained its simple style, and so turned to other philosophies. The turning point in his life came when he heard Ambrose preaching in Milan. Encouraged to investigate the Scripture in greater detail, he devoted himself to diligent study. His prolific writings testify to the thorough knowledge and insight he gained. His clear and perceptive explanation of the "Sermon on the Mount" and the "Lord's Prayer" lay bare the different levels of literal and symbolic meanings and provide a vital profound understanding of those most important Christian lessons. Augustine's "Commentary on the Sermon on the Mount" illustrates how the sermon provides the perfect standard for Christian life and explains how the Lord's Prayer not only says all that needs to be said to God, but also defines relationship to Him and to our fellow man. His works are essential reading for any Christian sincerely seeking closeness to God. They also offer timeless wisdom and guidance to all men and women today, regardless of faith or philosophy.

ST. LEO

Leo's life, unlike Jerome's, seems to have been devoted to peace-making and to bringing harmony to dissenters. He accomplished these goals by offering forgiveness and acceptance and by seeking reconciliation. He wrote in a simple direct style, considering his message more important than the choice of words. He was a simple and direct man like Pope John of our own time who did so much to unite Christians.

The Incarnation of the Word

[Justin has mentioned parallels to Christian beliefs in pagan mythology -- sons of gods and miraculous births.] My purpose is to establish that our beliefs, which we have received from Christ and the prophets who preceded him, are the sole truth and are anterior to all these chronicles; and that we claim acceptance not because our teaching coincides with theirs, but because it is the truth. And the truth is that Jesus Christ alone has been begotten as the unique Son of God, being already his Word, his First-begotten, and his Power. By the will of God he became man, and gave us this teaching for the conversion and restoration of mankind. Before he came as man among men certain inventors of fables, acting for those evil spirits of whom I have spoken, made use of poetry to publish their myths as fact.

'Christians before Christ'

It is unreasonable to argue, in refutation of our doctrines, that we assert Christ to have been born a hundred and fifty years ago, under Cyrenius, and to have given his teaching somewhat later, under Pontius Pilate; and to accuse us of implying that all men born before that time were not accountable. To refute this, I will dispose of the difficulty by anticipation. We are taught that Christ is the First-born of God, and we have explained above that he is the Word [reason] of whom all mankind have a share, and those who lived according to reason are Christians, even though they were classed as atheists. For example; among Greeks, Socrates, and Heraclitus; among non-Greeks, Abraham, Ananias, Azarias, and Misael, and Elias, and many others.

The Name of God

The Father of all has no name given him, since he is unbegotten. For a being who has a name imposed on him has an elder to give him that name. 'Father', and 'God', 'Creator', 'Lord', 'Master', are not names but appellations derived from his benefits and works. His Son (who alone is properly called Son, the Word who is with God and is begotten before the creation, when in the beginning God created and ordered all things through him) is called Christ because he was anointed and God ordered all things through him. The name Christ also contains an unknown significance, just as the title 'God' is not a name, but represents the idea, innate in human nature, of an inexpressible reality.

The Logos and the Philosophers

For myself, when I learned the wicked travesty by which the evil demons had disguised teachings of the Christians, in order to deter others from them, I laughed at the spreaders of false reports, at the travesty, and at the popular opinion. I confess that I prayed and strove with all my might that I might prove a Christian: not because Plato's teachings are contrary to Christ's, but because they are not in all respects identical with them: as is the case with the doctrines of the others, the Stoics, the poets, and the prose authors. For each, through his share in the divine generative Logos, spoke well, seeing what was akin to it; while those who contradict them on the more important matters clearly have not obtained the hidden wisdom and the irrefutable knowledge. Thus, whatever has been spoken aright by any men belongs to us Christians; for we worship and love, next to God, the Logos which is from the unbegotten and ineffable God; since it

as on our behalf that he has been made man, that, becoming partaker of our sufferings, he may also brings us healing. For all those writers were able, through the seed of the Logos implanted in them, to see reality darkly. For it is one thing to have the seed of a thing and to imitate it up to one's capacity; far different is the thing itself, shared and imitated in virtue of its own grace.

ΛΟΓΟΣ ΣΠΕΡΜΑΤΙΚΟΣ

Apologia, I, xxiii; xlvi;
Apologia, II, v, xiii.

From Henry Bettenson, The Early Christian Fathers, pp. 60-64.

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 PART III **World Council of Churches**
GROUP REPORT A:
CHRISTIAN-JEWISH-MUSLIM RELATIONS

A. Christian-Jewish relations

1. The present situation

While there are Jewish communities in all continents, formal dialogue between Christians and Jews has taken place primarily in North America, Western Europe and Israel. Often these dialogues were initiated by the Jews, and the Jewish participants are selected by organizations of our Jewish partners (e.g. International Jewish Committee for Inter-Religious Consultations (IJCIC)).¹ The choice of topics requires mutual acceptance. Through the Dialogue with People of Living Faiths and Ideologies (DFI) there has also been Jewish participation in multilateral dialogues (Colombo),² and our Jewish partners have expressed great interest in broadening the contact with Christians beyond the western orbit.

2. On the specific nature of relationship

(a) The historic relationship between Jews and Christians is unquestionably unique as Christianity emerged from within Judaism. The Jewishness of Jesus and the Apostles is a historical fact, and the Bible of the Jews became the Old Testament of the Christian Bible. Christian liturgy and theology have historic roots in the Jewish community. We thus have much in common.

(b) This unique historic relationship has marked the history of Jewish-Christian relations. At times it has expressed itself in mutual respect and even calling, as in the Jewish medieval scholar Maimonides' vision of Christianity (and Islam) as the bearer of Torah (Instruction) to the Gentiles, and in peaceful co-existence of Jewish and Christian communities, especially during long periods of Muslim rule and also, for example, in India and now in secular societies.

(c) The position of majority rule of one of the two parties lead, however, more often than not to various forms of suppression. The pre-

Christian phenomenon of anti-semitism (in the sense of anti-Judaism) became part of church history, especially in Europe, and found intensified forms in cultural and national histories, culminating in events like the Crusades, the Inquisition (spiritual genocide), and the Nazi Holocaust (physical genocide).

(d) To many western Christians this record makes it the first priority for Jewish-Christian relations to seek ways of eradicating once and for all the anti-semitism that has plagued the churches and the cultures in which they witness, and to warn other churches lest they fall prey to the sin of anti-semitism. This calling of western Christians has intensified their need for dialogue, and lead some of them to forms of identifying with Israel that may be questioned by other Christians, who should seek to give their own answers to the relationship between Jews and Christians.

(e) We noted that oppressed people have found much strength by identifying with the experience of Israel as a chosen people. For example, in Africa, among American Blacks, and in contemporary liberation theologies the Exodus is central to the faith, and suppressed people have so found in the very Bible brought by their oppressors the Word of God which gave them dignity and identity. Such an appropriation through Jesus Christ of Israel's experience is at the same time an affirmation of God's history with Israel.

(f) We want to consider in more depth how Jews and Christians are jointly, yet distinctly, participating in God's mission to his creation toward the "Hallowed be Thy Name" (*missio dei/qiddush ha-Shem*) (see 3, b, ii).

3. Recommendations for issues in further Christian-Jewish dialogue

(a) In all dialogues with Jews the following unavoidable questions will be present. Christians may give different answers to them, but the questions must be faced and recognized as valid in any dialogue.

- (i) What assurances can Christians give as to the eradication of the anti-semitism known in Christian history?
- (ii) In what sense can Christians identify with the right of the Jewish People to statehood?
- (iii) What assurances can Christians give against proselytising of Jews?

(b) Three issues may be recommended for future Christian-Jewish dialogue.

¹ See *Jewish-Christian Dialogue*. WCC, Geneva, 1975.

² See *Towards World Community: The Colombo Papers*. WCC, Geneva, 1975.

- (i) In what sense are the Christian Old Testament and the Bible of the Jews "the same Scripture"?
- (ii) Is there a mission and are there concerns that Jews and Christians have in common?
- (iii) How can our two communities contribute to world-wide community through dialogue?

B. Christian-Muslim relations

1. The present situation

There has been increasing contact between Christians and Muslims, and in terms of formal meetings this has been partly in the context of WCC-sponsored dialogues. Several meetings have been held on theological and religious issues as well as on the wider significance of the religious plurality, such as at Ajaltoun,³ Broumana,⁴ Colombo,⁵ Chambésy⁶ and Cartigny.⁷ All this is in addition to several regional⁸ and local conferences. Sometimes Christians' and Muslims' concern with political and social issues has pointed in the direction of attempts to reconcile the tensions of a given area. Under these circumstances we have had to proceed with each other at the pace and in the manner that seem particularly relevant to the situation.

2. Specific aspects of the relationship

(a) We are aware of the many values we share with Muslims, and our meetings have been facilitated by this common ground. But we would not wish to minimize differences, such as the sometimes negative views whereby Islam sees itself as fulfilling and superceding Christianity or whereby Christians dismiss Islam as a heresy or false prophecy. Somewhat going beyond these points of controversy is the more

open attitude of, on the one hand, Muslims who have a sense of Abrahamic kinship with Jews and Christians and, on the other hand, Christians who see Islam as a critical judgement upon the Church and then as endowed with its own sense of faith in one God and obedience to Him.

(b) We Christians recognize that Islam claims to possess in its sacred Scriptures a revealed knowledge of Christ some of which does not accord with our own understanding. Not only do Christians and Muslims differ as to their understanding of the authenticity of Christian, Islamic (and Jewish) Scriptures, but they are also unreconciled in their assessment of the significance of the Cross or of the Trinity. It is just as unrealistic to refuse to acknowledge these facts as it is unproductive to insist on them; for example, our past attempts to minimize the religious or moral stature of the Qur'an and Muhammad are unhelpful.

(c) Historically also there has been tension and rivalry from which we are still recovering. The whole history of our relationship in the Middle Ages and beyond and of western colonial expansion in Muslim lands is steeped in this tradition of mistrust and misunderstanding. Even our understanding and practice of mission has fostered a spirit of competitiveness and rivalry.

(d) Muslim concern with politics in many parts of the world, not least the Middle East, is sometimes coupled with a sense of religious vocation in which Christians may be invited to participate. For example, some of us have been approached to join Muslims to ward off atheism and secular ideologies. While by no means wishing to form a common religious front against others, we are deeply conscious of the need to allow our Muslim partners in dialogue to suggest what agenda they would like to adopt for discussion, and we welcome the potential contribution to the unfinished debate of the critique of religion and ideology among people of many faiths and ideologies.

(e) Another aspect of our relationship with Muslims is characterized by a keen interest in religion and theological issues, and this is especially the case in black Africa and Southeast Asia. Some of us are aware of a lively exchange of theological views in Indonesia, for example, where literary works are devoted to this theme. In various parts of Africa Muslims have shown an initiative in discussing questions of theological substance concerning the nature of revelation, the Person of Jesus and inspiration of Scripture. This means that what could appear as stumbling blocks in rival theories of the supremacy of one

³ See *Dialogue between Men of Living Faiths*. WCC, Geneva, 1971.

⁴ See *Christian-Muslim Dialogue, Papers from Broumana 1972*. WCC, Geneva, 1973.

⁵ See *Towards World Community: The Colombo Papers*. WCC, Geneva, 1975.

⁶ See *International Review of Mission* on "Christian Mission and Islamic Da'wah", Vol. LXV, No. 260, Oct. 1976.

⁷ See *Study Encounter*, "Present and Future Patterns of Christian-Muslim Encounter", Vol. XII, No. 4, 1976.

⁸ See *Study Encounter*, "The Unity of God and the Community of Mankind: Cooperation between African Muslims and African Christians in Work and Witness" and "Muslims and Christians in Society: Towards Goodwill, Consultation and Working Together in South-East Asia", Vol. XI, No. 1, 1975.

tradition against another in fact turns out to be a motivation for deep-level contact and encounter.

(f) A more recent aspect of our relationship related to the increasing appearance of Muslim communities in the West. The growing awareness on the part of the Church of this phenomenon is leading to increased contacts with Muslim organizations and representatives. Quite often these Muslims are concerned with acquiring a new self-confidence in their religious culture, with the result that they are more conservative in outlook. Yet some of us can testify of a real spirit of openness and sharing with such Muslims. For example, there are joint Christian-Muslim projects in various parts of the world in addition to several meetings and consultations in other places. At the international level both the WCC and the Vatican have been involved in discussions. There is also the hope of creating co-ordination between the Churches in Europe in their approach to their Muslim neighbours.

3. Recommendations for issues in further Christian-Muslim dialogue

Yet precisely because of such overlapping experiences and inter-involvement we are encouraged to build our relationships on a more positive footing, to re-direct our energies towards a new sense of inter-dependence in dialogue. Our resources to meet this new challenge are enormous, ranging from our understanding of the work and teaching of Jesus Christ to the special role which Arab Christians can play. Certain tentative issues may engage our attention in this respect:

- (a) An attempt on our side to acknowledge the special esteem and honour in which Muslim tradition holds Jesus and the Holy Family.
- (b) An awareness of the separate claims of Islam to the divine status of the Qur'an and to the Prophet's definitive role.
- (c) An appreciation of the difficult stages through which we have all passed but which, if approached properly in the context of dialogue, can provide a fresh motivation for sustained inter-involvement.
- (d) An acceptance of a common challenge and a common task in living in the world as it is while seeking to change it: we both seek to elevate people's sense of meaning and purpose of life; for our part as Christians we are acutely conscious of the *missio dei*, and in addition acknowledge our inescapable responsibility in seeking deeper understanding of God's work in the world; we are convinced that not only is our inter-dependence crucial for the health and improvement

of the communities we happen to share, but it is in the long term an essential part of our understanding of God's demands upon us.

(e) A mutual recognition that our respective religions accept a missionary calling and the responsibility of bearing witness to our faith: such a common understanding of God's work in the world should encourage us to seek greater collaboration in dialogue in mutual recognition of this fact.

C. Issues for trilateral dialogue between Jews, Christians and Muslims

1. The historical and theological relationships between these three communities call forth the hope for trilateral relationships. We welcome and encourage local, regional and non-institutional initiatives such as the Standing Conference of Jews, Christians and Muslims in Europe. We also hope that the work of the DFI with other units of the WCC on Human Responsibility for Nature will serve as an appropriate theme for such a dialogue.

2. We believe that our understanding of our Christian faith will receive new perspectives if it were to be more fully informed by the questions raised in dialogue with Jews and Muslims concerning Scripture, the Trinity, the Crucifixion, the Resurrection, Mission and obedience to God.

3. The increasing presence of Muslims in many parts of the West (Great Britain, Continental Europe, the U.S.A., including Black Muslims) make trilateral dialogue there both possible and urgent.

4. Out of such dialogue, and in preparation for a deeper mutual understanding we urge the churches to make sure that textbooks on all educational levels give an authentic picture of Judaism and Islam, more acceptable and sensitive to the Jewish and Muslim communities.

5. We believe that the present tensions in the Middle East call for the encouragement of informal and personal contacts between the three communities until such a time as a more formal dialogue can take place. Much care must be taken in the choice of place for such a hoped for venture.

6. We look forward to the day when the city of Jerusalem, the city of peace and blessing (*Shalom/Salaam*) for our three faiths, will be not only the symbol but a fuller manifestation of our common bond in history and in God.

**JESUS CHRIST AND
THE LOSTNESS OF MAN**

An old popular song tells it like it was:

"Don't bank down those inner fires,
Follow out your heart's desires
Until the day comes when they come for you,
Make today a holiday, take tomorrow, too
You can't take it with you, Jack,
And when you're gone you can't come back
You are only going - through!"

That's an old song, well before your time. As a matter of fact it was popular in Egypt before 1300 B.C. My version is a bit of a paraphrase. You can find a more literal translation under "A Song of the Harper" in Pritchard's Ancient Near Eastern Texts.⁽¹⁾ For more than three millenia men have been drinking to the idea that you only go around once so you had better grab for gusto while you can. But beneath the bravado lurks fear - the fear of death. The "morning after" is bad enough, but what of the night after? Life never escapes that shadow.

From the time of the "Song of the Harper" comes the song of another harper, full of solemn grandeur rather than trivial froth: the song of Moses the man of God, Psalm 90 in the Old Testament. Again we hear of the brevity of human life: "they are as a sleep: in the morning they are like grass which groweth up. In the morning it flourisheth, and groweth up; in the evening it is cut down and withereth" (vv. 5,6)

(1) James B. Pritchard, Ancient Near Eastern Texts (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950), p. 467

*some
period*

But Moses sets the brevity of man's life in fearful contrast with God's eternity: "Even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God...a thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past, and as a watch in the night." (vv. 2,4)

Put against God's eternity, our living is only slow dying and not even slow dying, at that. Death's shadow flies upon us and blots out today's sunlight with tomorrow's darkness. Life is only a breath, and that breath is a sigh. The Nobel playwright Samuel Beckett takes up Moses' theme in the briefest, strangest, and strongest of his plays, entitled, "Breath." It is a play without a hero, without actors, without words. The stage is set with a pile of junk. As the light grows we hear a baby's birth cry, then a long inhalation, followed by a choking exhalation, that ends in a death-rattle. Beckett's bitter hope can offer only another birth cry as the stage sinks into darkness. "We bring our years to an end as a sigh" (v. 9). Our life-breath expires in that sigh.

Men try to come to terms with death. Fortified with arguments for immortality, Socrates drinks the hemlock with philosophic calm. Tasting the yet more bitter cup of Vengefulness a modern terrorist sows death that he may reap it. A popular Freudian philosopher warns that the fear of death is the morbid fruit of repression. Liberate the body from all repressions, he says, and it will be ready to meet death with no life unlived.⁽²⁾ The opposite advice is no less ancient (or modern): mortify the body as the prison of the soul, and hasten the absorption into the cosmic consciousness. But death's head is still visible behind the many masks we make. Even a doctor of thanatology must die.

But if death is the last enemy, it does not come as a stranger. The horror of the death we do not know reaches us in the agony of the life we do know.

(2) Norman O. Brown, Life Against Death (N.Y.: Vintage Books, 1959), p. 308

I am poured out like water,
And all of my bones are out of joint:
My heart is like wax;
It is melted within me.
My strength is dried up like a potsherd;
And my tongue cleaveth to my jaws;
And thou hast brought me into the dust of death" (Ps. 22:14,15).

The anguish of the sufferer in the Psalm intensifies the sigh of frustration to a roar of agony. Man's misery is quiet despair at best. At worst it is a scream from the depths.

Yet all the sufferings of life and the death they foreshadow do not in themselves fill the cup of human misery. The poison in the cup is our guilt. Moses mourns, "Thou hast set our iniquities before thee, our secret sins in the light of thy countenance."

Standing beneath an empty sky, a man can strike a tragic pose as the victim of mortality. He can even pretend to be a hero of the absurd, who gives meaning to life's meaninglessness by an act of will. Albert Camus pictures Sisyphus (doomed in Tartarus) as heroically human precisely because his labor has no meaning. He toils forever to roll a rock up a hill knowing that it will forever roll down again. "There is no fate," says Camus "that cannot be overcome by scorn." Yet the scorn with which a man shakes his fist at the empty sky shows that the sky is not really empty. Man's sense of tragedy betrays him. Man is not a victim but a rebel. He stands before God and stands revealed for what he is - a sinner. God's holiness manifests the enormity of our crimes against our brothers. In his rebellion man cannot only sanction, but even sanctify his hatreds in tribal or national pride. He can brutalize his women and discard his babies. Hilarion, a traveling businessman

of the year 1 B.C. writes a letter to his wife in Egypt - "If by chance you bear a child, if it is a boy, let it be, if it is a girl, cast it out." (3)

It is before the living God that adultery is vile and infanticide murder. The dignity that "humanizes" man is the reflection of his likeness to God - his creation in God's image. By that image God's claim is on every man - he cannot be made a chattel or a pawn without defiance to his Maker. When Jesus was asked whether Jews should pay taxes to Caesar he asked to see a Roman silver coin, a denarius. One was produced from a questioner's fat purse. "Whose is the image and superscription?" asked Jesus. "Caesar's" was the reply.

Jesus' retort is a double-edged sword: "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, but give to God what is God's."

We need to ponder the kingdom teaching of this Messiah who authorized Roman taxation. But even more we need to ponder the kingdom claim of the other edge of Christ's saying. Who bears the image of God? We do. What do we owe to God? Ourselves. God's image sets God's seal against all exploitation of our fellow-man. But it does much more. It forbids us to rob God by withholding ourselves. When the Apostle Paul describes the unrighteousness of men he begins at the beginning - with their ungodliness. They are without excuse, because "knowing God, they glorified him not as God, neither gave thanks; but became vain in their reasonings, and their senseless heart was darkened" (Rom. 1:21).

In strange ways God causes even the wrath of men to praise him. Just as man's tragic sense witnesses to God's creation, so man's rage witnesses to God's righteousness. Try taunting some furious protester with the logic of what he claims to believe. Tell him, "O.K., so there is no God; man is a chemical accident in a random universe. What are a few thousand lives, more or less? What if a bomb suddenly re-organizes the molecules that were for the moment patterned in the form of a little girl. So what? No energy is lost."

(3) C.K. Barrett, ed., New Testament Background: Selected Documents (N.Y.: Macmillan, 1957).

When he calls you a fool or a monster, his rage for righteousness bears witness to the God he denies. We measure right and wrong by an absolute standard. We are blind not to see that the imperative of "rightness" points beyond our own desires or the desires of other men anywhere or everywhere. Only before the living God does morality find meaning. All sin is at last sin against God. The most heinous sin is the root of all other sin - rebellion against God. Because the mind of the flesh is enmity against God we cannot see our sin as it is. Paul says that our understanding is darkened in the ignorance of hardened hearts (Eph. 4:18). Violence, licentiousness, greed, envy, murder - all the perversity that poisons human society springs from a deeper hate that we disguise and deny. We hate God, and we hate him because he is God: holy, just, and good.

It is the measure of our hardening that hating God is made the least of sins - perhaps even a virtue: Promethean courage against an omnipotent tyrant. When God pleads with his rebellious people in the Old Testament, he exhausts the images of broken faith to show how heinous the great sin is. Israel is a vine bearing bitter grapes to the divine vinedresser who has spared no pains in cultivation (Isa. 5). God's people are a rebellious son turning against the father who held him in His arms and taught him to walk (Hos. 11). The nation is an adulterous wife requiting a husband's faithful love with shameless harlotry.

We may be filled with rage at calloused crimes of selfish violence reported in the newspaper, but we cannot comprehend the wickedness of violent rebellion against the living God. Yet our judgment is proportionate to our crime. Moses descends to one last level in his Psalm of human misery. The tragedy of life is not only the vanity of our days and the sinfulness of our hearts. There is more, for the sinfulness of our hearts is open to the eyes of God: "Thou hast set our iniquities before thee, our secret sins in the light of thy countenance" (Ps. 90:8). Therefore, "we

are consumed in thine anger, and in thy wrath are we troubled" (v. 7)... "all our days are passed away in thy wrath" (v. 9)... "who knoweth the power of thine anger and thy wrath according to the fear that is due unto thee?" (v. 11).

Moses' Psalm has its setting in the wilderness where a generation of rebels was doomed to wander until they perished. Refusing to believe that God would give them the land of promise they heard God's word of judgment turning them back to the desert. That word echoes in Psalm 90: "Thou turnest man to destruction and sayest, return ye children of men." (v. 3).

Men are not only sinners, they are "children of wrath," subject to the righteous judgment of God. Death comes as a curse, "the wages of sin is death." (Rom. 6:23). "It is appointed unto men once to die but after this the judgment" (Heb. 9:27).

Paul the Apostle in the fifth chapter of Romans is at pains to trace the course of sin in the world to its source. Where death comes, there sin is being judged. The death-knell tolls through the genealogies of Genesis, the first book of the Bible: "and he died...and he died...and he died." Those who died were judged as sinners. Before the law had been given to Moses, before its precepts could call sin to account, men were guilty and liable to death.

At what point, then, did sin enter, and death through sin? Evidently in the first sin of the first man, Adam. Through one trespass death ruled over many (Rom. 5:19). Paul, of course, presses on to the parallel in salvation. As one act of sin made men guilty, caused sin to be charged against them - for all men sinned in Adam (Rom. 5:12, 18), so one act of righteousness brought justification and life to the new humanity in Christ.

We may need to review the apostle's reasoning in reverse. As Christians we understand that Christ was our representative who stood in our place as the Head of the new humanity. But we must also recognize the role of the first Adam in

relation to the Second. The guilt and judgment of Adam's transgression is shared by those who are united to Adam their head by God's creative appointment. All die in Adam because all are guilty in Adam. The sinfulness of all humanity is not a survival of the jungle; it is the result of the fall. Man's doom stretches back to his initial rebellion and grows with his multiplied iniquity.

Before God's holiness, our ruin is complete. We are dead in trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1). We are by nature children of wrath (Eph. 2:3). It is the heart of man that is "deceitful above all things and exceedingly corrupt." (Jer. 17:9). No, man is not as bad as he can be, for God restrains men from the hellish fury of their own corruption. But no part of man escapes the blight of sin. His mind is at enmity with God "for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can it be; and they that are in the flesh cannot please God" (Rom. 8:7,8).

And more - man the sinner is in bondage not only to evil but to the Evil One. He is taken captive by the snares of the Devil (II Tim. 2:26) and walks according to the prince of the powers of the air, the Evil Spirit that works in the sins of disobedience" (Eph. 2:2). Men who were made to be sons of God have become children of the Devil, doing the works of their father and doomed to share his judgment (Eph. 2:2); Matt. 25:41, 46; Jn. 8:44).

Man's bondage to evil rolls like a subterranean river of fire through human history. In willful ignorance man fabricates his delusions and destroys himself and his world in the lusts of his idolatries (Eph. 4:18; Rom. 1:28; 6:21, 23). No man can overlook human evil; he may only add to it, by condoning as pitiable that which God reveals to be damnable.

But God is not mocked. Whatever a man sows he will reap. The biblical teaching about the wrath of God is very different from the mechanical wheel of fate in Eastern religions. God cannot be a detached observer in a spiritual world of cause and effect

ushered. They are without eyelids; nothing can be changed or forgotten, and since they are already dead, murder or suicide is impossible. Given that setting, the "Hell is other people" line is easy to understand! But the climax of the play is in an earlier line. After bitter conversation has stripped away their pretensions, the "hero," Garcin is revealed as a coward who had deserted his comrades. Inez, who has savagely torn away Garcin's lies, says, "You are - your life, and nothing else."(6)

"You are - your life, and nothing else." No, you cry. I am not what I have been - I am what I am going to be; I am what I meant to be. In the day of judgment, the gaze before which you will stand naked is not the lidless eyes of another sinner, but the burning eyes of Almighty God. There will be no injustice, only truth; you will be revealed for what you are, and nothing else. "Yea, O Lord God, the Almighty, true and righteous are thy judgments." (Rev. 16:7).

When every knee bows to God in the day of judgment, all rebellion is ended. No sinner will dispute God's sentence. The gnashing of teeth that Scripture describes on the part of those who are forever lost is no longer the gnashing of hatred and defiance, but the anguish and remorse.(7) We who still taste the possibilities of earthly life cannot imagine the meaning of existence without hope where the guilt of past rebellion seals the abiding wrath of God. Michelangelo tried to portray the horror of the lost on the wall of the Sistine Chapel, where the damned sink down behind the altar. Yet neither Christ the Judge nor the doomed who peer out from the candle soot of the centuries are convincing figures. Far worse are the grotesque horrors of Hieronymous Bosch. No, the meaning of judgment must be approached from within, nor without. The Man who rejects what the Bible teaches about the Last Judgment should stand before God instead of presuming to call God to account. Let him ask, before God, "What do my sins deserve? The deepest agony of hell itself is

(6) Ibid, p. 45

(7) Henri Blocher, "La doctrine du châtement éternel" Ichthus 32 (April, 1973) p. 8

the realization that eternal separation from God is what the sinner has demanded and deserved.

The solemn argument of Paul in Romans concludes that all men are under God's wrath because all men deserve it. The nations of the Gentiles are without excuse, for they have forsaken the God they know. He never left himself without a witness - in the world and in their own hearts. Their very ignorance is of their own making; their false worship of their own devising; and their degrading vices their continuing delight. But when the Gentiles are condemned by self-righteous men who know the law, Paul writes a stronger condemnation. Not the hearers of law are justified, but the doers. The man who knows the law and disobeys is worse than the man who never knew the law. Paul's conclusion is the verdict of the Psalmist: "There is none righteous, no, not one; there is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God... that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may be brought under the judgment of God" (Rom. 3:10, 11, 19b)

Yes, there are mouths today that chatter on, mouths of men excusing themselves and blaming God, or excusing others to overturn the sentence of God. The only remedy is for the man with the mouth to stand before God. If he beholds the Lord, he will cry with Job, "I had heard of thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth thee: wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes" (Job 42:6)

Yet in describing some of the teaching of the Bible about man's lostness I have been holding back the context in which we learn these things. To consider lostness, death, and doom by themselves we end up splitting Bible verses in half. "The wages of sin is death" - yes, we must know that in the sin explosion of our times - but how can we stop with "death?" "But the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (Rom. 6:23).

fire, rendering vengeance to them that know not God, and to them that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus; who shall suffer punishment, even eternal destruction from the face of the Lord and the glory of his might..." (II Thess. 1:7-9).

But if that were Christ's only coming, no sinner could be spared. "Who can abide the day of his coming? And who can stand when he appeareth? For he is like a refiner's fire..." (Mal. 3:2).

Even John the Baptist, Jesus' forerunner had difficulty here. He preached the coming of the Messiah to judgment, the Messiah who would baptize with fire and hew down every tree of wickedness. When Jesus wrought miracles of healing rather than signs of wrath, when he opened the eyes of the blind rather than bringing thick darkness, when he raised the dead rather than slaying the wicked, John sent an inquiry from prison - the prison from which the Messiah had not set him free. "Art thou he that cometh, or look we for another?" (Lk. 7:10). Jesus kept John's two disciples with him while he performed more miracles of hope. "Go," he said, "and tell John the things which ye have seen and heard; the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good tidings preached to them" (v. 22).

Jesus' answer reflects the prophecy of Isaiah 35:5ff, a promise of the blessings of renewal in God's kingdom of salvation. But how could blessing come without judgment? What gospel is there for the poor until their exploiters and oppressors are judged?

Jesus said to John, "Blessed is he whosoever shall find no occasion of stumbling in me" (Lk. 7:23). The answer that John awaited in faith is given to us in the gospel. Jesus came first not to wield the axe of judgment but to bear the stroke of death. Christ, the Judge who must tread the winepress of the wrath of God, Christ Himself bears the wrath and drinks the cup from the Father's hand. By his blood we

covenant promise. The word "Meribah" does not mean merely a controversy. It means a law-case. In Micah 6 the prophet uses the term to describe God's law-case against Israel as he summons the mountains and the foundations of the earth to bear witness to his faithfulness.

God is a righteous and just Judge. If the people demand a court hearing, a trial will be held. God tells Moses to pass before the assembled people and to call the elders of the people into session. Moses is to take in his hand the rod of judgment, the rod with which he smote the River of Egypt, turning the Nile to blood. In the Pentateuch, the rod is both the symbol and instrument of the infliction of judgment. A guilty man in a controversy was to be beaten with the rod before the face of the judge (Deut. 25:1-3).

But now Moses takes the judicial rod and lifts it to inflict the sentence of judgment. In Isaiah 30 the prophet describes the descent of the rod of God's wrath upon the Assyrian enemy "For through the voice of the Lord shall the Assyrian be dismayed; with his rod will he smite him. And every stroke of the appointed staff, which the Lord shall lay upon him, shall be with the sound of tabret and harps..." (Isa. 30:31,32).

Dread fell upon Israel as Moses lifted the rod of God. Upon whom would the wrath of the Lord descend? Here is one of the most amazing verses in the Bible. God says to Moses, "Behold, I will stand before thee there upon the rock in Horeb; and thou shalt smite the rock..." (Ex. 17:6).

Nowhere else in the Old Testament does God say that He will stand before a man. God is the Judge. Men come to stand before him. Provision is made for hard judicial cases that can be appealed to the priests, Levites, and judge in the place where God will set his name (Deut. 17:8-9).

But here God stands before Moses the Judge with the rod of judgment. God has been accused, and he stands in the prisoner's dock. God is symbolized by the Rock on which he stands. In the Pentateuch, "Rock" is a name for God "Ascribe ye greatness unto our God, the Rock, his work is perfect" (Deut. 32:3,4). The Psalms that speak of Masseh-Meribah call God the Rock (Ps. 95:1,8; 78:15-17, 35).

God commands Moses to smite the Rock. It would be impossible for Moses to smite the Shekinah glory of God. God bears the smiting and living water flows forth to the people. For this reason John bears witness in his gospel that when the spear was thrust into the side of the crucified Savior there flowed forth blood and water (Jn. 19:34). The Rock in the wilderness was Christ (I Cor. 10:4) and great was Moses' sin in striking the Rock a second time (Num. 20:10-13).

The mystery of God's mercy foreshadowed in the Old Testament is fulfilled in the New. The measure of God's love shows the reality of his wrath. Do not tell the Father his wrath is too great when he must direct it against his Beloved Son!

Gather all your doubts about the depth of man's lostness and the justice of God's wrath and come to the cross of Jesus Christ. But be prepared to stay. Stay till you sense something of the love of the Father for his only begotten and beloved Son. How much does the Father love the Son? The Son, who was in the bosom of the Father before the world was...the Son, the firstborn, of whom God says, "I will be to him a Father and he shall be to me a Son" (Heb. 1:5)...the Son in whom the Father's heart delights...the Son who prays, "Father glorify thy name!"...How much does the Father love the Son at Calvary as he takes the cup and is obedient to death?

Stay at the cross and hear the cry of the abandoned Sufferer, "Eloi, Eloi, Lama sabachthani?" "Why", he cries. "Why, my God, has thou forsaken me?" His agony is not the tearing of his flesh, the mocking malice of his enemies, or the flight of his friends. It is the abandonment of His Father. Does the wrath of God seem

fearful to you? Then bow before the One who alone knows all of its fearful mystery and dread. "Who knoweth the power of thine anger, and thy wrath according to the fear that is due unto thee?" (Ps. 90:11).

Bring the question of Moses to the cross of Calvary. Who knows God's wrath? The Son of God knows, for the Holy One was made a curse for sinners. Let the "why" of Christ's agony swallow up the "why" of your proud ignorance.

The Father hears His beloved Son. He hears and is silent. "I will never leave thee or forsake thee" - that is the promise of God's covenant faithfulness. But at Golgotha the promise of God seems to fail for that One who was always faithful and fulfilled all righteousness.

Who can enter here? We cannot imagine the price God the Father paid at Calvary. Only dimly we remember the figure of Abraham leading his beloved Isaac up Mount Moriah. Yes, Isaac was spared, for the Lord must provide the sacrifice. In the fullness of time, God spared not his only Son, but delivered him up for us all.

What would God not give for his Son? "For the Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand" (Jn. 3:35). "For God so loved his only begotten Son that he gave the world that he might not perish...!" No, that is not John 3:16! "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life."

In giving his Son, God gives himself, and here is the measure of love.

Dear friends, the gospel sets the cross before our eyes and there we see the wrath of God and the love of God together.

Were perishing not what it must be, the Father would have answered the "why" of his son's agony. But there is no other answer. Christ's dying agony measures the deep hell of human guilt, exposed to the wrath of God. The zeal of God's holiness consumed him.

Do not trifle with Calvary. The Apostle pleads, "Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance? But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up for thyself wrath in the day...when God shall judge the secrets of men, according to my gospel, by Jesus Christ" (Rom. 2:4,5,16).

No, rather, let the solemnity of God's holy wrath at Calvary open your eyes to the wonder of his love.

"Who know not Love, let him assay

And taste that juice, which on the cross a pike

Did set again abroad; then let him say

If ever he did taste the like.

Love is that liquor sweet and most divine,

Which my God feels as blood; but I, as wine." ()

() "The Aconie," George Herbert. F. E. Hutchinson, ed. The Works of George Herbert (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1941), p. 37

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Conversion in the New Testament

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AT the end of the last century, there appeared a brief article by Dr. Frederick Field of Trinity College, Cambridge, entitled "Is 'Conversion' a Scriptural Term?" In this inquiry, Dr. Field admitted the real fact of conversion; but he protested against the "indiscriminate and fanatical use of the word" in his day and pointed out both the infrequent biblical occurrence of the actual term, and also the not infrequent mishandling of the kindred terms in the AV translation. He particularly deplored the general assumption that conversion is "necessary". "When conversion is insisted upon," Dr. Field continues, "as universally necessary in order to a state of salvation—when preachers divide their hearers, being believers in a common Christianity, into the two classes of 'converted' and 'unconverted'—when the former class are led to cherish overweening ideas of eternal salvation, and the latter are driven to despair of their spiritual state, . . . a candid inquiry, how far such views of conversion are consistent with a 'discreet and learned' ministration of the Word of God, can never be deemed superfluous or inopportune."¹

This present essay takes its starting point without apology from the New Testament, in an attempt to examine the evidence for the subject of conversion as it stands, and to provide a biblical background for the discussion of this issue from other directions. In so doing, it may be possible to assess the validity of Dr. Field's provocative remarks.

* * * *

Our study will first take account of the language of conversion in the New Testament, next of its illustration, and finally of its theology. We shall then be in a position to draw together some practical conclusions.

First, then, we must examine the occurrence and meaning of the verb ἐπιστρέφω and its cognates στρέφω and the noun ἐπιστροφή. The background of all three terms, both in Hebrew and in classical and secular Greek, suggests not only a literal and physical turning (both transitive and intransitive), but also the sense of a change of direction involving mind and spirit.

The relevant Hebrew verb, שׁוּב, occurs in a large number of varied contexts. It describes the action of Reuben, who "returned" to the pit in Dothan to discover Joseph's disappearance (Gen. 37: 29), and of Moses, when he "turned again" into the camp from the tent of meeting (Ex. 33: 11). It is also used of repulsing or "turning back" enemy forces (Is. 36: 9), and passively of retreating or "turning back" in the face of the foe (Ps. 44: 10). The sense of שׁוּב in all these four examples is literal, even if the verb is employed with slightly differing connotations.

There are other contexts in the Old Testament, however, which

employ the same term in a non-literal sense, both religious and non-religious. It occurs, for example, in the passage where Jeroboam voices his suspicion that the allegiance of the northern kingdom would "turn back" to the house of David, if the Temple worship continued to be centralized at Jerusalem (1 Ki. 12: 26f.), and it is also the verb used to depict the effect of a "soft answer" on wrath (Prov. 15: 1). The verb *שׁוּב* is frequently used in contexts which speak of "turning" as a change of heart, or spiritual reorientation. Negatively this appears as turning back to iniquity (Jer. 11: 10), or turning away from Yahweh Himself (Num. 14: 43); and positively this kind of conversion manifests itself as turning *from* wickedness or transgression (Ezek. 18: 27f.), and turning *towards* God (as in the case of Josiah, for example, who "turned to the Lord with all his heart", 2 Ki. 23: 25). There is a similar use of this verb in the Old Testament describing the turning of God towards man, either in blessing (Ps. 80: 14) or in wrath (Josh. 24: 20).³ It was no mere play on words, moreover, that caused exilic prophecy to speak in one breath of "returning" to Jerusalem, that Jewish spiritual centre of gravity, and to Yahweh Himself (Is. 51: 11 and 55: 7, *al.*).

Where the movement of the conversion is Godward, the action is often the subject of exhortation (Ezek. 18: 30; Hos. 12: 6, *al.*), or referred to as directly the work of an agent. The Psalmist's prayer is that God Himself will restore or "turn again" His people (Ps. 80: 3); and fifteen times altogether in the Old Testament God is said to turn men to Himself. Again, the messianic promise of Malachi is that Elijah *redivivus* will avert judgment and prepare Israel for its Lord, by first effecting a general "conversion" of heart within families (Mal. 4: 5f.; *cf.* 2: 6). *שׁוּב* is also used in a similarly transitive sense in contexts which do not speak of a spiritual or specifically Godward conversion; as in the case of Moses, for example, who reported or "caused to turn back" the words of the people to Yahweh (Ex. 19: 8):

From the evidence of the Old Testament, therefore, we are already able to see that the basic meaning of *שׁוּב* is "to turn back" or "return", and that the verb is used both transitively and intransitively to denote a change of direction involving the total beginning. This "turning" may also be encouraged and even effected by an agent. In its non-literal, theological sense, the term describes a change of relationship between man and God. The normative reference in the Old Testament is the conversion of the nation of Israel as a whole, in the light of its covenant history, to Yahweh. In this case, "return" follows, and needs to follow, infidelity to the terms of the covenant (*cf.* Deut. 30: 2f., which is again a mutual "returning"); and for this reason, as Dr. J. I. Packer has reminded us,⁴ national repentance is often accompanied in the Old Testament by fresh covenant-making (*cf.* the intention of King Hezekiah, 2 Chr. 29: 10). The pagan city of Nineveh, the individual leaders Josiah and Manasseh, and the prospects of a universal turning to the Lord, are some of the exceptions to the regular pattern of conversion as a national, Israelite affair.⁴

In his book *Turning to God* (1963), Professor William Barclay has drawn our attention to the background occurrence of the New Testa-

ment words for conversion in classical and secular Greek. Once more, ἐπιστρέφω and στρέφω are regularly used, in both transitive and intransitive senses, to mean a change of direction which is literal as well as non-literal.⁸ Particularly noteworthy for this study is the use of ἐπιστρέφω in Epictetus (*Discourses*, 2, 20, 22), mentioned by Professor Barclay.⁹ In reply to an offer to prove the goodness of piety and sanctity, comes the invitation: "By all means prove it, that our citizens may be converted and honour the divine being (οἱ πολῖται ἡμῶν ἐπιστραφέντες τιμῶσι τὸν θεῖον)". This sense of the term ἐπιστρέφω is manifestly "religious", and it anticipates the evidence of the New Testament itself, to which we must now turn.

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We do not need to linger over the three terms προσήλυτος (Mt. 23: 15; Acts 2: 10; 6: 5; 13: 43), ἀπαρχή (Rom. 16: 5; 1 Cor. 16: 15), and νεόφροντος (1 Tim. 3: 6), all of which have been translated in some English versions of the New Testament by using the word "convert".¹⁰ In each case the terms are near-technical, and do not describe the process or significance of conversion, but rather the "status" it confers.

Ἐπιστρέφω (which regularly translates שׁוּב in the LXX) is often used in the New Testament intransitively, to describe the literal and physical act of turning or returning. Jesus "turned" (ἐπιστραφεὶς) in the crowd to discover who had touched Him (Mk. 5: 30), and Peter "turned" to see the beloved disciple following himself and Jesus (Jn. 21: 20). Mary and Joseph "returned" to Nazareth from Jerusalem after the Presentation (Lk. 2: 39), and those εἰς τὸν ἀγρόν at the time of the ἔσχατον are warned by Jesus not to "turn back" for their mantles (Mk. 13: 16 and parallels). The verb in its literal sense regularly appears in the middle voice, and is not used transitively. The prophecy that John the Baptist, in the spirit and power of Elijah, will "turn" (ἐπιστρέψει) the sons of Israel to the Lord their God, and also the hearts of father to children (Lk. 1: 16f., echoing Mal. 4: 5f.), and the exhortation of James about "bringing back" a sinner from error (James 5: 19f.), both use the verb transitively; but in each case there is a shading over into a non-literal and indeed spiritual meaning.

The most common New Testament use of ἐπιστρέφω, and the one that chiefly concerns us, is intransitive and non-literal; once again it denotes a mental or spiritual reorientation, most usually in the direction of the Lord. Three points are important in this section of our investigation. First, the verb never appears in the New Testament in a passive sense, and the subject of the action of "turning" in the sense we are considering is always the person involved. The effect of Isaiah's prophetic commission, however this is to be understood, is represented as a hindrance to conversion: "lest they turn" (using שׁוּב) "and be healed" (Is. 6: 9f.). This logion is quoted four times in the New Testament (with an additional echo in the Lucan version of the saying of Jesus about the purpose of His parables, Lk. 8: 10): twice by Jesus,

once by the Fourth Evangelist (using στρέφω), and once by Paul.⁸ In each case the initiative lies with ὁ λαός. Similarly, as a result of the healing of Aeneas by Peter, and of the preaching at Antioch, large numbers of people "turned" (ἐπέστρεψαν) to the Lord (Acts 9: 35; 11: 21); and the Thessalonian Christians, also, are described as having "turned" (ἐπεστρέψατε) from idols towards God (1 Thess. 1: 9).

Second, while the subject of conversion is always the convert, the action may be encouraged and assisted by an agent; and this is a pattern we have already noted from the background to this terminology in the Old Testament. For example, after the healing of the lame man at the gate of the Temple, Peter exhorts the people to "turn again" (ἐπιστρέψατε) so that their sins may be blotted out (Acts 3: 19). A negative version of this theological pattern is presented by the description of God sending His servant (Παῖς) to turn *away* (ἀποστρέφειν) men from their wickedness (Acts 3: 26); though here the verb ἀποστρέφω is used transitively, and its subject is the agent of the "conversion".

Third, ἐπιστρέφω only once in the New Testament describes the "returning" of a Christian who has been unfaithful to his Lord. The word of Jesus to Peter (Lk. 22: 32) is that when he has "turned again" (ἐπιστρέψας) he should strengthen his brethren. Whereas שׁוּב in the Old Testament consistently refers to the restoration of a broken covenant relationship, ἐπιστρέφω in the New Testament denotes (except in this one instance) a unique occasion of reorientation. The contrast involved in the change is vividly drawn in terms of darkness and light, the power of Satan and the rule of God, or the worship of idols and the service of the living God;⁹ while the complete and unrepeatable character of the changed relationship is emphasized by a persistent use of the aorist tense. On the other hand, the apostate or backslider in the New Testament is not called to conversion, but to repentance (Rev. 3: 3, 19, *al.*); though it is also true, as we shall see later, that μετάνοια as well as ἐπιστροφή belong to the initial stage of Christian commitment.

The use of the verb στρέφω in the New Testament presents us with similar conclusions. Στρέφω is used intransitively and in a literal sense to describe the physical act of turning or turning round. Paul "turns" with the Gospel from the Jews to the Gentiles (Acts 13: 46). There is a further reference in the speech of Stephen to God Himself "turning" (ἐστρέψεν), and delivering up the apostate Israelites "to worship the host of heaven" (Acts 7: 42); and, in the same speech, στρέφω is used in a non-literal sense of the Israelites "turning" (ἐστράφησαν) to Egypt (7: 39, clearly echoing Num. 14: 3 which uses שׁוּב). Luke uses this verb frequently as a graphic way of describing Jesus, who "turns round" (στραφείς) to look at Peter (Lk. 22: 61), for example, or to speak to the daughters of Jerusalem (23: 28).

The spiritual connotation of the verb στρέφω, finally, appears much less frequently than is the case with its counterpart, ἐπιστρέφω. We have already seen the active significance of στρέφω in the quotation

from Isaiah 6 at John 12: 40, where the parallels and Acts 28: 26f. use ἐπιστρέφω. The same conclusion therefore applies to the use of στρέφω when it signifies reorientation in the direction of God—that the subject of the conversion is the convert, who takes the initiative. Στρέφω is used in this sense at Matthew 18: 3; and there again, in spite of the AV translation, the verb has a reflexive and not a passive character. Jesus says, “ unless you turn (ἐάν μὴ στραφῇτε) and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven ”.

The cognate noun for “ conversion ”, ἐπιστροφή, occurs only once in the New Testament. Paul and Barnabas, on their way to the Jerusalem council, report the ἐπιστροφή of the Gentiles to the brethren, and thus provide an occasion for “ great joy ” (Acts 15: 3). Apart from its quasi-technical appearance, this use of the term does not provide us with any further evidence for the meaning of conversion in the New Testament.

We may summarize thus far our New Testament findings, in the light of their background. Ἐπιστρέφω and the cognates of this verb derive their non-literal sense of a decisive, Godward reorientation, from a literal, intransitive use meaning a change of direction. From the spiritual use of these terms, conversion in the New Testament is seen to be the action of the convert himself, to be inclusive and complete, to involve a changed relation between man and God, and to be possibly encouraged, though (unlike the Old Testament) very rarely effected, by an agent.¹⁰

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With this linguistic evidence in mind, it will be instructive, secondly, to examine in some detail the five examples of Christian conversion which appear in Acts, since this appears to be an obvious and suitable point of departure. If the range of the selection given to us by Luke is not large, at least it is representative. All five examples refer to individuals of differing background, nationality, sex, and temperament. All five occasions are attended by differing circumstances and precipitated by differing causes. But, as we shall see, all five have certain important features in common. At the outset, it is noticeable that each example presents us with a description of the process of conversion and its results, without using the στρέφω terminology, and without attempting an explanation of either its theology or psychology.

By way of further prolegomena to this section, it is interesting to notice what makes conversion “ Christian ”. In none of the New Testament instances of στρέφω and its cognates so far examined is the “ turn ” of reorientation described explicitly as conversion to Christ.¹¹ On the two occasions in Acts (9: 35 and 11: 21) where believers are described as “ turning to the Lord ” (Κύριος) the context makes it likely that the object of the conversion referred to is (as in 15: 19 and 26: 20) the Lord God.¹² Commitment to Christ is, as we shall see, always central to the process of conversion; but the conversion itself, in the sense that we are now using that term, ultimately has God as its object, and indeed as its subject. What makes conversion Christian,

then, is the presence of Jesus Christ Himself, or the preaching about Him, and also the subsequent act of faith in Christ the true *imago Dei*, expressed by the convert in baptism. In other words, conversion is a turning to God *through* commitment to Christ.

We must first take account of the background to the occurrence of conversion in the early history of the Christian church, evident in the activity of preaching. We have already noticed the place of the preacher as an agent of conversion in the New Testament, and it will not be out of place to investigate his contribution more closely. The general pattern emerging from the kerygmatic proclamation recorded in Acts indicates that the direct challenge to "convert" to God was rarely given. Only once in the speeches of Acts is a word in the στρέφω group used in a context of straightforward exhortation; this is Peter's injunction to "repent and turn again", given after the preaching that followed the healing of the lame man (Acts 3: 19). A second, less direct example occurs in the fragmentary address of Paul and Barnabas at Lystra (Acts 14: 15ff.). The apostles see opportunity to speak arising from the confused situation following the healing of a cripple as part of their evangelistic programme (εὐαγγελιζόμενοι ὑμᾶς); and the content of their "good news" is "that you should turn (ἐπιστρέφειν) from these vain things to a living God" (verse 15).

The preaching of John the Baptist provides a model for the mechanics, if not the content, of the early apostolic proclamation. The Baptist was preaching (κηρύσσων) in the wilderness of Judea. Matthew alone summarizes the content of John's preaching in terms of the advent of the Kingdom of God (3: 2); although Mark and Luke both include in their accounts the theme of repentance, in the face of the crisis and judgment associated with the imminent arrival of ὁ λοχῦρότερος. And all three Synoptists associate the appearance of John the Baptist, and therefore his message, with the fulfilment of prophecy; the prophetic word in this case is Isaianic: "Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight" (40: 3). The challenge is implicit: God has turned to men, who need to turn to Him even as they prepare for His arrival.¹³ The imminence of the Kingdom, in fact, exerts eschatological pressures which discover sin, demand repentance, and lead to conversion.

Inevitably, the same pattern is typical of the ministry of Jesus. He takes over from the Baptist the theme of the Kingdom (Mk. 1: 15 = Mt. 4: 17, *al.*), and addresses man as sinful and "unturned", in need of repentance and salvation (Mk. 2: 17b; Lk. 13: 2f.; 15: 4ff., *al.*). In line with this, Professor Werner Kümmel, in his book *Man in the New Testament*, has reminded us that the teaching of Jesus "presupposes the common sinfulness of all mankind", and embodies a "call to conversion which is similarly universal in scope."¹⁴ The Johannine tradition, in its own way, as well as the Synoptic, makes it clear that Jesus both inaugurates the Kingdom of God, and also provides the means of entry into it; it is on this basis, indeed, that He issues to all men a summons to repentance and faith. The prediction of the angel about John the Baptist, that "he will turn many of the sons of Israel to the Lord their God" (Lk. 1: 16), seemingly imparts a character to

John's ministry more positive than that of Jesus, who (in Simeon's words) "is set for the fall and rise of many in Israel" (Lk. 2: 34). But it is the teaching of John that is in fact strongly pervaded by the flavour of judgment in the face of impending crisis (Lk. 3: 17, *al*); in the teaching of Jesus, the notes of judgment and division are carefully balanced by the truth of promise and salvation *through* judgment (Jn. 12: 31f.), in the light of which conversion becomes a real possibility as well as an imperative demand (12: 36).

What then is the content of the preaching to which those in the days of the apostles who "were being saved" (Acts 2: 47) responded? The debate about the precise limits of the apostolic kerygma, and the material it included, has not ended.¹⁵ The normative assumption in this respect, which we have learned from the work of A. Seeberg, M. Dibelius, C. H. Dodd and A. M. Hunter,¹⁶ is that St. Paul and the other New Testament writers are indebted to an underlying *paradosis* which may be described as "the apostolic kerygma". That there was a fixity about this tradition, which caused a regular kerygmatic pattern to emerge each time the Gospel was preached in the primitive Church, has been challenged by Professor C. F. Evans,¹⁷ for example, who is more prepared to discover "kerygmata" than "the kerygma" in the speeches of Acts; and more recently by Mr. D. E. H. Whiteley, who in his book, *The Theology of St. Paul* (1964), speaks of the kerygma as an "activity" of proclamation, which gathered to itself a continually expanding content, and not one that was unalterable (p. 10).

No one denies, however, that even if the speeches in Acts contain what Professor Evans calls a skilful Lucan "arrangement" of the main themes of the apostolic preaching,¹⁸ a "hard core" of doctrine apparently featured regularly in the apostles' proclamation; and this is reflected in Acts and elsewhere in the New Testament.¹⁹ It is important for our present purpose to recall the familiar fact that the central point of the apostolic kerygma is the redemptive activity of God in Christ. The incarnation, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, which are the basic elements of the preaching, manifestly appear as acts of God. Through and through, the work of salvation is His. It is God who attests the man, and glorifies His servant, Jesus (Acts 2: 22; 3: 13); it is He who raises from the dead the Author of life, killed with His own foreknowledge (Acts 3: 15; 2: 23; 10: 40ff.). In other words, the apostles recount the heilsgeschichte which has become centred in God's final visitation. Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, sees the birth of his son as part of God's ultimate plan to "visit and redeem his people" (Lk. 1: 68);²⁰ and, understandably, Luke alone among the evangelists catches the comment of the bystanders at Nain after the raising of the widow's son: "God has visited his people!" (Lk. 7: 16). It is no accident, therefore, that the motif of "visitation" features explicitly in one speech of Acts, as well as implicitly in the apostolic preaching as a whole. At the Jerusalem council (Acts 15), when the conversion of the Gentiles is reported, the speech of James recapitulates Peter's news in terms of a covenant "visitation" which fulfils the prophecy of Amos 9: 11f. (δ, Θεὸς ἐπεσκέψατο λαβεῖν ἐξ ἐθνῶν λαὸν τῷ ὀνόματι αὐτοῦ, verse 14). There is accordingly a natural

sequence in the pronouncement of James: God has turned to the Gentiles, and "we should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn (ἐπιστρέφουσιν) to God" (verse 19).

The preaching of the apostles includes, therefore, a high eschatological content, since the visitation of God which is announced is seen to involve judgment as well as salvation. In his book *The Kingdom of God in the Teaching of Jesus* Dr. Norman Perrin has traced the background to this expectation in the eschatology of late Judaism and the Qumran sect, and shows us the "infinite variety of imagery" used in the relevant literature to illustrate the twin themes of God's intervention in history, and the final state of the redeemed resulting from this." The "day" of God's visitation ushers in the events of the end-time; and with the End both judgment and hope are revealed. This is surely the point of Peter's exhortation: "Save yourselves from this crooked generation" (Acts 2: 40). The "generation" stands under condemnation because of its rejection of the Christ (*cf.* Lk. 17: 25); the only way out is to be saved by calling on the name of the Lord (Acts 2: 21, quoting Joel 2: 32). The process of conversion in this case begins with a reception of the kerygmatic λόγος (Acts 2: 41),²² which leads in turn to repentance, the baptismal expression of faith, forgiveness, and the gift of the Spirit (verse 38); it is a direct response, in fact, to the heralding of God's active visitation in the person of His Son. To this paradigm of conversion we shall return.

* * * *

We are now in a position to investigate the five accounts of the individual experience of conversion recorded in Acts. The five people concerned are the Ethiopian (Acts 8), Paul (Acts 9, 22, and 26), Cornelius (Acts 10, 11, and 15), Lydia (Acts 16) and the Philippian jailer (Acts 16). We have already glanced briefly at the problem of the historicity of the speeches in Acts; and this is not the place to begin a detailed review of Lucan historiography, or to pursue (for example) the reason for the triple record of the conversions of Paul and Cornelius. Since we can do no other, we must consider the material before us as it stands.

Once more, a fairly consistent pattern is discernible in each case of conversion; and six stages may be adduced from the five accounts we are given. In passing, it is an impressive fact that in no case does anything like an explicit confession of faith occur by itself, and apart from baptism. It is assumed that the patently credal statement of the Ethiopian, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God" (Acts 8: 37), read by one eighth century manuscript, a variety of patristic witnesses, and a few others, is a later, "Western" interpolation.

The first stage, then, may be described as preparation. The Ethiopian was reading the scriptures (8: 28); Paul had been well trained in Judaism and the Law (22: 3; 26: 5), and must have known intimately the doctrine of those he was persecuting (9: 2; 22: 4; 26: 9-11); Cornelius was a God-fearer and a man of prayer (10: 2); Lydia was a worshipper of God and also in the habit of praying (16: 13f.); and even the Philippian jailer may have been given the opportunity of

listening to Paul and Silas preaching, since the apostles were in Philippi "some days" before they were imprisoned (Acts 16: 12).

The second stage is the preaching about Jesus, or His presence. Philip explains the good news of Jesus to the Ethiopian (8: 35); Jesus Himself forms the content of Paul's vision on the road to Damascus (9: 5; 22: 8; 26: 15); Peter preaches God's visitation in Christ to Cornelius and the other Gentiles (10: 34-43; 11: 14); Paul delivers some kind of proclamation in the hearing of Lydia (16: 13f.); and Paul and Silas deliver the λόγος τοῦ Κυρίου²² to the jailer and his household (16: 31f.).

Third, there is inquiry. The Ethiopian questions Philip about the passage he is reading (8: 34); Paul asks Jesus for His identity (9: 5; 22: 8; 26: 13) and, in one account, for His commission (22: 10); Cornelius asks the "angel" for an explanation of his vision (10: 4); and the jailer asks the pertinent question of Paul and Silas, "Men, what must I do to be saved?" (16: 30).

Fourth, there is evidence of the activity of God.²³ The Spirit is associated with the ministry of Philip, who is the agent of the Ethiopian's conversion (8: 29, 39; at verse 39, the "Western" addition distinguishes between Πνεῦμα and ἄγγελος,²⁴ in order to link the convert's baptism with the gift of the Spirit); Paul encounters the Lord directly (9: 4ff.), and at the hands of Ananias, also prompted by God (verses 10ff.), presumably receives the Spirit—before baptism (verses 17f); Cornelius sees an angel of God in his vision (10: 3, 30), and also receives the Spirit before baptism, the evidence of which is speaking in tongues (10: 44ff.; 11: 15; 15: 8); and the Lord "opens the heart" of Lydia (16: 14).

Fifth, the convert in each case undergoes baptism (8: 38; 9: 18; 10: 48; 16: 15; 16: 33).

Finally, there are evident results of the conversion in each case. The Ethiopian and the jailer rejoice (8: 39; 16: 34); Paul preaches Christ (9: 20, 22; 26: 22f.); Cornelius speaks with tongues, extolling God (10: 46); Lydia and the jailer display the Christian virtue of hospitality (16: 15, 34; cf. 1 Pet. 4: 9).

What conclusions may be drawn from this evidence? In the actual description of the conversion in these five instances, only one stage belongs inseparably to them all; and that is the baptism of the convert, with (here) its implicit confession of faith.²⁵ We may for the moment disregard the results of conversion, which do not belong centrally to the occasion which is being recounted, even if they cannot be divorced from it. Otherwise, the stage of preparation is clear in four accounts, but more doubtful in the case of the jailer; while the activity of proclamation is associated with four of the conversions, though not directly with Paul's. Four of the converts ask questions, but Lydia does not; and in four cases, but not that of the jailer (except possibly in the attendant earthquake, Acts 16: 26), divine activity is prominent.

But, given the limitations of our evidence, certain features are sufficiently common to all these accounts for certain general deductions to be permitted. First, the spiritual experience in question is more than simply the work of a moment; second, it is frequently occasioned

by preaching; third, some kind of intellectual activity, however elementary, is involved; fourth, the conversion is undertaken by an individual who is treated as a whole personality; fifth, the believer is related more or less immediately to the total life of the Church by the instrument of baptism, often directly associated with the gift of the Spirit; and finally, as the premise of all that may be said about conversion in the New Testament, the work is from first to last a response to the *opus Dei*. It is this final conclusion that must govern and modify our earlier discovery about the initiation of the process of turning.

The experience of Augustine of Hippo in the garden at Milan (A.D. 386) forms as it happens an interesting parallel to these New Testament illustrations of conversion, since it includes a number of common features. Augustine himself gives us evidence of preparation for his divine encounter—in particular the prayers of the saintly Monica, but even more directly his own reading of the Scriptures, represented by the *codex apostoli* which he left with Alypius, and to which he returned." Second, his companion Alypius, who was so helpfully at hand during this experience, may well have acted as an exponent of the kerygma. Third, Augustine asks a question, in the words and mood of Psalm 6: "O Lord, how long?" (verse 3). Fourth, he interprets the words which he hears, *tolle lege*, as a divine command, and therefore as evidence of the work of God. Fifth, though not until Easter of the following year (387), Augustine is baptized; and finally, the immediate spiritual outcome of his experience is Christian assurance (*lux securitatis*), supported by his mother's joy." The fact that Augustine finishes his account with a doubtful use of theological language (referring to God as exclusively the subject of the action of conversion, *convertisti enim me ad te*"), need not detain us.

* * * *

We must now relate the conclusions we have so far reached on the subject of conversion in the New Testament, to the theology of the New Testament as a whole.

It will first be necessary to examine the place of repentance in conversion. The literal meaning of *μετάνοια* refers primarily to an intellectual activity. But its use in the New Testament implies a change of mind which is positive as well as negative, and which involves the personality of the individual as a whole. In the Q passage, Matthew 12: 39-42=Luke 11: 29-32, the repentance of the man of Nineveh is described by Jesus as a response to kerygma; and the obvious interpretation of the "sign of Jonah" in terms of the ministry of Jesus Himself, is that He embodies a proclamation demanding repentance. This is precisely the pattern of the initial stages of conversion illustrated in the paradigm of Acts 2: 37ff., already mentioned: repentance follows the reception of the word. And the repentance involved contains a positive as well as a once-for-all aspect; it is a "return" to the source of salvation, as Pierre Bonnard has reminded us, in the case of the Baptist's preaching of repentance, which derives its real meaning from the biblical idea of covenant

itself, and is something totally different from mere "remorse".¹⁰ When Peter instructs Simon Magus to repent of his mercenary wickedness (Acts 8: 22), or when the writer of Hebrews exhorts his readers to refrain from re-laying a "foundation of repentance from dead works" (Heb. 6: 1), the "conversion" implied is certainly negative. But in the context of evangelical preaching, the demand shades over already into the positive issue of repentance.

For this reason it is not surprising that repentance and conversion are linked together in an early speech of Peter (Acts 3: 19, μετανοήσατε οὖν καὶ ἐπιστρέψατε), and in Paul's summary of his preaching to the Gentiles, in his defence before Agrippa (Acts 26: 20, μετανοεῖν καὶ ἐπιστρέφειν ἐπὶ τὸν Θεόν). In the same way, repentance is associated in the New Testament with factors belonging to the process of conversion: faith (Mk. 1: 15; Acts 20: 21), forgiveness (Acts 5: 31), knowledge of the truth (2 Tim. 2: 25), and new life (Acts 11: 18). Repentance, then, is the particular response of the individual to the eschatological crisis ushered in by the incarnation, in which the sinner recognizes his need to "turn to the Lord", so that the veil over his mind may be lifted (2 Cor. 3: 16). In this respect it is a notable characteristic of the start of a Christian life. But repentance also belongs to every part of Christian experience. Itself a gift of God (cf. Acts 11: 18), the dynamic obligation of repentance is a standing pointer to the paradox of grace. It cannot be the work of a moment, any more than conversion itself.

This leads us to our next consideration, the relation between conversion and baptism. The gift of repentance, baptism, and the coming of the Spirit are inseparable in the New Testament theology of conversion. John the Baptist preaches a "baptism of repentance" as a sign of the dawning rule of God (Mk. 1: 4); and he promises a baptism with Holy Spirit (verse 8). After the gift of the Spirit at Pentecost, the apostles preach repentance and baptism (Acts 2: 38). And when the Holy Spirit has been "poured out even on the Gentiles" who accompanied Cornelius (Acts 10: 44f.) the astonished comment of the Jerusalem church is: "Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance unto life" (Acts 11: 18). The connection is anything but formal. The activities of repentance and baptism are positive and prospective in character; both depend upon the agency of God the Holy Spirit, and both express a total reorientation of the individual's life in a Godward direction. They are both, in fact, focal expressions of the entire conversion process which occur within it.

We are very familiar with the impossibility of dissociating, on the New Testament showing, the experimental and sacramental aspects of baptism. Bishop Stephen Neill, in his volume on *The Interpretation of the New Testament* (1964), emphasizes the fact that admission to the churches of what he terms "early Catholicism" was "by faith and baptism"; and he points out the contrast existing between the New Testament situation and so much contemporary Protestantism in Europe.¹¹ Whatever interpretation may be given to baptism, then and now, does not alter the fact that without it a believer did not enter the primitive community of faith. "The New Testament knows nothing

of membership in the Church by faith alone, without the accompanying act of obedience and confession."

This is the significance, surely, of the case-histories from Acts which we have examined. All the five individuals concerned, like those who hear the preaching of Peter on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2: 41), express their conversion and commitment in baptism. In this way, in one respect at least, their conversion and commitment are completed; and also in this way they become incorporated into the Christian community, with its marked characteristic of *κοινωνία* (Acts 2: 42). To ask therefore whether Paul became a Christian on the road to Damascus, or at his baptism itself, is a wrong way of posing the problem. Chronologically Paul's divine encounter, his Christian commitment, and his baptism, occur at different moments;" but theologically these are inseparable. Baptism is, as always in the New Testament, an articulation of something much larger than itself.

What happens in baptism, then, that makes it relevant to this discussion? Pauline sacramentalism, at least, implies a distinction between "outward" and "inward", but not a division." The rite of baptism, therefore, and the "obedience to the faith" it expresses (Rom. 1: 5) belong to the same process. The practice and significance of baptism, as Professor C. K. Barrett says, are rooted in the eschatological events of the death and resurrection of Jesus (Rom. 6: 3-11)." We may add that it is itself an eschatological reply to the announcement of God's judgment and salvation. Man's part in baptism consists of repentance (Acts 2: 38), faith (Col. 2: 12), and a completely new spiritual orientation (Rom. 6: 11). But these actions are entirely responsive. Because of the work of God in Christ, it is possible through baptism and by faith to receive forgiveness (Acts 2: 38), renewal (Tit. 3: 5), incorporation into Christ (Rom. 6: 5), grace to live the new life (Rom. 6: 22), and the gift of the Spirit (Acts 2: 38)."

Baptism in the New Testament, therefore, is not merely one step in the line of conversion. As a genuine means of grace, it is conversion. We have already seen that it includes all the elements that belong to the conversion paradigm of Acts 2: 37ff.: response to the word preached, repentance and faith, and the gifts of forgiveness and the Spirit. Far from being sensitive to the "outwardness" of baptism and "inwardness" of conversion, or to the possible dispensability of the sacramental activity, the New Testament gives us the franchise to be thoroughgoing sacramentalists. In this capacity, our task is to insist that, as a sacramental focus, baptism (at least) expresses precisely the same elements of Godward movement as typify conversion *in toto*.

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It has already been maintained on New Testament grounds, none the less, that the subject of conversion is the convert. To say that baptism is conversion, therefore, and to clarify the parallel between baptism and conversion in terms of man's response to God, still does not take account of the part played by God Himself in the action as a whole. It is here that we shall be forced to examine the relation of regeneration" both to baptism and conversion. For in the first place, as John Baillie's posthumous monograph on *Baptism and Conversion*

(1964) makes clear, baptism is "inseparably connected with regeneration" in the New Testament;²² though we are presented throughout with the fact, and not the mechanics, of the association. In this way, the baptismal action is related to the twin poles of man's conversion and God's regeneration; it makes plain the constant biblical truth, that man converts but God renews.

It is important that the two motions of conversion and spiritual re-creation should not be confused, as they seem to be throughout Bishop Joost de Blank's essay *This is Conversion*.²³ Conversion is man's process of turning; and at some point in the turn God regenerates and gives eternal life (2 Cor. 5: 17; Rom. 6: 23). But both actions are normally expressed and conveyed in the focus of baptism, when the total movement of conversion and the precise moment of regeneration, whether consciously or not, coincide and become articulated. Rebirth in Christ, that is, involves inward and outward, God's part and ours, regeneration and conversion, Spirit and water (Jn. 3: 5).

Before we leave the subject of conversion and regeneration, it will be useful to examine three related New Testament concepts. The importance in Acts of the kerygma, preached by the agent of conversion and received by the person who converts, has already been noticed. It is not surprising, therefore, that the verb ἀκούω is also used to describe the initial stages of the process of conversion. The presence of evangelistic activity can be referred to as "hearing the word of the Lord" (Acts 13: 44; 19: 10). Similarly, the correct response to the evangel is represented as "hearing", in the sense of "receiving" or "believing" the word. The conversion of Cornelius and his companions is described simply as an illapse of the Spirit on those who "heard the word" (τοὺς ἀκούοντας τὸν λόγον, Acts 10: 44); and the report of this event at the Jerusalem council associates "hearing the word of the Gospel" with belief (Acts 15: 7). Evidently Luke's normal way of narrating conversion in Acts is to say that companies or individuals "believed (on the Lord Jesus Christ)";²⁴ and in this way ἀκούω and πίστεύω become virtually parallels. So again, when Paul is at Corinth, the brief record of the conversion of Crispus is followed by a note that "many of the Corinthians hearing Paul believed and were baptized" (Acts 18: 8). Here we have a complete triad: "hearing-faith-baptism". Finally, when Paul during his imprisonment at Rome turns in despair from the Jews to the Gentiles (Acts 28: 25ff.), he interprets this strategic move as a fulfilment of prophecy (Is. 6: 9f. once more). The Jews "hear" without understanding, and their ears are so "heavy of hearing" that they cannot (or perhaps, do not) turn to the Lord for healing. The apostle therefore looks optimistically in the direction of the Gentiles, convinced that they will "listen" (verse 28).

The transition to the concept of obeying the word is a natural one, provided by language as well as theology, since ἀκούω and ὑπακούω are close in form and meaning. Numbers of Jerusalem priests are described as becoming "obedient to the faith" (Acts 6: 7). Paul regards the purpose of his apostleship as the encouragement of "obedience to the faith" (Rom. 1: 5); and he sadly admits that,

although hearing is impossible without preaching, Israel as a whole has not been obedient (οὐ πάντες ὑπήκουσαν) to the good news which *has* been preached (Rom. 10: 16). The apocalypse of Christ at the ἔσχατον, to take one further example, will involve vindication for the faithful, but vengeance for those who "do not obey the Gospel" (2 Thess. 1: 8). The thought of "obedience" is thus a possible New Testament description of conversion; and it is closely related to the alternative descriptions of "hearing" and "receiving" the word of the Gospel. And clearly baptism is never far removed from these three expressions, since it is the normative New Testament focus of the audition, reception, or obedience which has already taken place. But like baptism itself, all three are seen to contain a further, dynamic dimension. To hear, receive, or obey the word, and to express this fact sacramentally, carries future as well as present implications. A discussion of the relevance of this dynamic to our subject will bring us to the final section of our study, the completion of conversion.

But, in passing, thirdly, it will be relevant to consider the place of the mind in New Testament conversion, since we noticed the presence of intellectual activity (however rudimentary in form) in four out of the five illustrations from Acts. There are certainly no scriptural grounds for claiming that the content of the πίστις which a man exercises when he turns to God (cf. Mk. 1: 15; Acts 16: 31, *al.*) is purely, or even primarily, intellectual.⁴¹ But this does not alter the fact that the mind has a part to play in conversion. Paul describes the unbeliever as one whose mind (νόημα) is hardened or blinded (2 Cor. 3: 14; 4: 4); and, conversely, he finds the total attitude of the Christian epitomized in the "renewed mind" (νοῦς) which results when the natural νοῦς is transformed by the Spirit (Rom. 12: 2). The fresh orientation of conversion can be described, indeed, in terms of an intellectual renewal. When Paul exhorts the readers of Ephesians to work out existentially the spiritual implications of being in Christ, he recalls the basis of their Christian experience in language which rings with intellectual overtones: "You did not so learn (ἐμάθετε) Christ!—assuming that you have heard (ἠκούσατε) about Him and were taught (ἐδιδάχθητε) in Him, as the truth (ἀλήθεια) is in Jesus" (Eph. 4: 20f.). And even when the writer goes on to draw out the moral implications which these words naturally contain, he places the injunction, "be renewed in the spirit of your minds" (verse 23),⁴² between the two stages of the familiar parænetic pattern, "put off . . . put on" (verses 22 and 24); so that this kind of intellectual reorientation and renewal becomes a representative, if not an indispensable, part of the conversion process.

This survey of the theology of conversion in the New Testament, finally, will not be complete without some reference to the relation between conversion and sanctification. On the basis of linguistic evidence, it was earlier maintained that the "turn" of New Testament conversion normally denotes a process which is complete and unrepeatable. On the other hand, baptismal incorporation into Christ, which draws this process together, is linked in the New Testament with sanctification (1 Cor. 6: 11), both individual (2 Tim. 2: 21) and

communal (Acts 20: 32). Christian holiness or sanctification always contains an element of incompleteness; and it is possible to maintain that in the same way baptism and conversion (both of which relate to the area of spiritual experience denoted by the verb ἀγιάζειν and its cognates) are also incomplete. In one sense they have taken place, but in another they still need to be made complete. The demand from the convert is that he should turn to God; and, after the event, the process—of whatever length—can be described (as it is by Paul in 1 Thessalonians 1: 9) in terms of a completed action in the past. Yet the converted Christian is also called to *be* converted; he is baptized, but needs to express the significance of this status experimentally (Rom. 6: 3ff.); he is called ἅγιος, but needs to *become* ἅγιος (Col. 1: 22f.).⁴⁸ The biblical principle, *ecclesia renovanda quia renovata*, has repercussions for the individual that bear strongly on our subject.

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The total context of conversion now becomes apparent. The illustrations of conversion from Acts already surveyed indicate the presence of events leading up to and away from the event. In each case the convert is prepared, and in each case there is subsequent evidence of his conversion. The occasion described is in fact one of many; so that we are not compelled to regard it as an isolated event, unrelated to the history of God's covenant relationship with man. The intimate association of baptism with conversion in the New Testament is a sufficient reminder of this truth. For in baptism the believer enters the divine ἐκκλησία, and takes his place as a member of the commonwealth of Israel and of the household of God. In this context the present and future tenses of salvation are prominent, as the newly converted Christian, who has already expressed his commitment in baptism, continues to express his commitment by sharing in the deep κοινωνία of the body of Christ, by receiving the διδασχλή, and by meeting in the Spirit the demands of the new law of ἀγάπη.

The theology of justification by grace through faith, draws together in precisely the same way the total range of God's activity and man's response. As the dialectic of Luther, *simul justus et peccator*, makes plain, justification is a work of God's continuing grace, of which the righteous, like the converted, stand in constant need. But once more we must clarify our terms. The status of δίκαιος carries a two-fold reference, involving as it does the action of both God and man. And this double polarity is but another description of regeneration and conversion. The subject of conversion is man, whose response to God in faith (focused in baptism) is answered at one point by the divine work of regeneration or justification (also focused sacramentally). Both actions are complete *and* needing completion. They point indeed in the direction of the consummation, when the individual, the Church, and creation itself, find their ἀποκατάστασις in Christ; when all things are made new, and the dwelling-place of God is finally with men (Rev. 21: 3-5).

From the linguistic, illustrative, and theological evidence we have collated, it will be possible to draw some conclusions.

First, it is necessary on the New Testament showing to distinguish in this discussion between the terms "regeneration", describing a status, and "conversion", describing a process. Yet these two concepts can never be kept apart. There is a sense in which both are "status" words; that is, when the moment of regeneration coincides with the line of conversion. And there is also a sense in which both terms are "dynamic", since both point towards a *τέλος* which has not yet been reached. Conversion and regeneration belong together, then, just as baptism and commitment belong together; and of those four concepts, the second pair (baptism and commitment) are seen to express and convey both members of the first (conversion and regeneration). It is possible for all four, regarded as chronological "events", to coincide in time; though in practice the number of occasions when this happens is likely on all counts to be minimal.

Second, we have seen that conversion may be described as the work of man, encouraged and possibly (but rarely) effected by the agency of preachers. Regeneration, *per contra*, we have seen to be the work of God through and through. But (as again we have noticed) conversion may also be regarded as a response to the work of God, and its consistent source must indeed be understood to be God Himself. This is the pattern of Ephraim's cry to Yahweh: "Bring me back that I may be restored" (Jer. 31: 18; LXX, "turn me back and I will turn").⁴⁴ The divine initiative is also manifest in our five illustrations of conversion in Acts; since it is the Spirit who joins Philip to the Ethiopian, Jesus who reveals Himself to Paul, an angel of God who appears to Cornelius in a vision, the Lord who opens Lydia's heart, and (quite possibly) divine intervention that brings the jailer to the point of commitment. The division between conversion and regeneration, therefore, which may be correctly maintained on the grounds of linguistic usage, must not be allowed to obscure the radical truth of the *gratia Dei*.

Third, if the distinction between "process" and "status" is to be carefully maintained, where conversion represents the line (shorter or longer), and regeneration a point on the line, at what moment, if any, is it possible to say, "I am converted", or "I am regenerate"? Here, of course, we are face to face with the well-known difficulties which arise when the eternal impinges, or is made to impinge, on the chronological. It also raises in an acute form the issue of Christian assurance. But in the face of these major points of debate, the New Testament makes it perfectly clear that a line *can* be drawn. It is to be drawn before and after the moment at which a man can say, "Abba, Father" (Rom. 8: 15), and include in that cry of dependence all the distinctively Christian categories that the New Testament allows. In this case it is possible to claim to be converted and regenerate with as much boldness, and perhaps as much hesitation, as it is possible to claim to be married.

Fourth, one question, of practical as well as theological import, may still linger in our minds. How essential is conversion? Is it possible for me to be a Christian without being converted? We are probably weary of reminders that there is no archetypal conversion "experience"

to which we must all submit, though no doubt this was what Dr. Field had in mind when he spoke of the arrogance of those who claim to be converted. This reminder is none the less relevant to the present stage of our discussion. The five case-histories from Acts suggest that even on so small a canvas the experience of conversion can be painted with considerable variety. Those of Paul and Cornelius are spectacular; those of Lydia and the Ethiopian far more restrained; that of the jailer more "sudden" than any. If the question is, "Must I have a conversion experience?", in the sense in which that term is usually understood, the answer on New Testament grounds is surely in the negative. But if the question is, "Must I be converted?" or "Must I be regenerate?", the answer on the same grounds is (*pace* Dr. Field) unequivocally in the affirmative.⁴

Finally, the need to be converted certainly formed part of the apostolic kerygma, and conversion was an evident characteristic of the primitive Church. Furthermore, this appeal was made to men as total and responsible personalities, in the context of a community which became the family of the new converts. Preaching in this way for conversion and therefore rebirth, and the addition daily to the Church of new men in Christ who are being saved, should surely characterize with at least equal clarity the life and witness of the Christian Church today.

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² Cf. also Zech. 1 : 3, where man's return is balanced by a "return" on the part of Yahweh.

³ J. I. Parker: article "Conversion", in *The New Bible Dictionary* (London, 1962), p. 251a.

⁴ Cf. Jonah 3 : 6ff.; 2 Ki. 23 : 25 ; 2 Chr. 33 : 12f.; Ps. 22 : 27.

⁵ W. Barclay : *Turning to God* (London, 1963), pp. 18ff.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

⁷ Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 15ff.

⁸ Mt. 13 : 14f.; Mk. 4 : 12 ; Jn. 12 : 40 ; Acts 28 : 26f.

⁹ Acts 26 : 28 ; 14 : 15 ; 1 Thess. 1 : 9.

¹⁰ Lk. 1 : 16f. and James 5 : 19f. are exceptions. The grammar of Acts 26 : 18 makes the subject of τοῦ ἐπιστρέψαι uncertain.

¹¹ This is even true of the "return" of Peter to which Jesus refers (Lk. 22 : 32).

¹² In 2 Cor. 3 : 16f., Κύριος is identified as Πνεῦμα.

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¹⁷ C. F. Evans : "The Kerygma," *Journal of Theological Studies*, N.S., VII, 1 (April, 1956), pp. 25-41.

¹⁸ C. F. Evans : *loc. cit.*, p. 32.

¹⁹ Cf. D. E. H. Whiteley : *op. cit.*, pp. 9f.

²⁰ The LXX of Ex. 4 : 31 uses the same verb (ἐπισκέπτομαι) in a similar, though less "final", sense.

²¹ N. Perrin : *The Kingdom of God in the Teaching of Jesus* (London, 1963), pp. 160ff.

²² It is not unusual for what is obviously the experience of conversion to be described in Acts as "receiving the word" (cf. 8 : 14 ; 11 : 1 ; 17 : 11).

²³ Other witnesses, including $\kappa^* B$, read (λόγος) τοῦ Θεοῦ at 16 : 32.

²⁴ Clearly the chronological precision of this stage cannot be pressed.

²⁵ Cf. Acts 8 : 26.

²⁶ Hippolytus, *Apostolic Tradition* 21, gives us evidence that explicit confession of faith formed an integral part of the baptismal rite in the early Church.

²⁷ Augustine : *Confessions* 8. 12.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

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³⁰ P. Bonnard, *L'Evangile selon Saint Matthieu (Commentaires du Nouveau Testament, Paris, 1963)*, p. 32 and n. 3.

³¹ S. C. Neill : *The Interpretation of the New Testament 1861-1961* (London, 1964), p. 188, italics his.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ The moment of Paul's commitment is in any case uncertain.

³⁴ Cf. D. E. H. Whiteley : *op. cit.*, pp. 170-3.

³⁵ C. K. Barrett : *The Epistle to the Romans* (London, 1957), pp. 129f.

³⁶ There is, however, no regular New Testament pattern for the direct association of baptism with the gift of the Spirit.

³⁷ The term παλιγγενεσία as such is almost non-existent in the New Testament ; but the concept of "renewal" is everywhere apparent.

³⁸ J. Baillie : *Baptism and Conversion* (London, 1964), p. 17.

³⁹ Joost de Blank : *This is Conversion* (London, 1957).

⁴⁰ Cf. Acts 4 : 4 ; 8 : 13 ; 11 : 17 ; 14 : 1, *al.*

⁴¹ Cf. W. Barclay : *op. cit.*, pp. 53ff.

⁴² Or, following NEB, "you must be made new in mind and spirit". The Greek is tantalizingly obscure.

⁴³ The tension is marked in this passage. Paul reminds his readers that they have been reconciled to God in order to be "presented as holy" to Him (Col. 1 : 22) ; but the character of this holiness is related *tout court* to their future life and conduct as Christians (verse 23).

⁴⁴ Here הָשִׁיב (to cause to return) and שׁוּב (to return) are both translated in the LXX by ἐπιστρέφω.

⁴⁵ Cf. J. Baillie, *op. cit.*, pp. 104ff.

Conversion

BY THE RIGHT REVEREND STEPHEN NEILL, WYCLIFFE HALL, OXFORD

IN some Christian circles the word 'conversion' seems to be regarded almost as a dirty word. The reason for this, appears to be that members of these groups refuse to attribute to the word any meaning other than an adolescent emotional experience, without transforming power and usually transitory in its effects. If this were indeed the meaning of the word, it might well be dispensed with. But in point of fact no other word has been found which so well expresses something essential to New Testament theology.

It has been pointed out times without number that 'repentance' is a very inadequate rendering of the Greek word *metanoia*. Some have proposed that this should rather be translated 'a change of mind', but this too is very far short of giving the full meaning of the word. When Peter indignantly rejects the idea that the Messiah could suffer, Jesus turns to him and says, 'Peter, the trouble is that you are thinking the way ordinary men think; you have to learn to think the way God thinks'. This is, of course, a paraphrase, but I think an exact expression of what the Greek words mean. Now such a change in man's whole way of thinking is bound to be revolutionary, indeed catastrophic, and this dimension is precisely what is lacking in many presentations of the meaning of Christ's words and teaching. Such a demand cannot simply be fitted on to other ways of thinking; it makes an uncompromising demand, to the effects of which on human life no limits can be set.

This is basically what is meant, whenever the word 'conversion' is correctly used. Generally it is used in Christian contexts, but it has to be recognized that this is perhaps putting an artificial limitation on its use. We may perhaps, recognize six legitimate uses of the term, and two others which we shall not recognize as permissible.

1. There may be conversion from one non-Christian system to another non-Christian system; as

from Hinduism to Islam. In times of Muslim dominance this may be no more than superficial but there is no reason to suppose that it will always be so.

2. There may be conversion from a nominal to an existential commitment to a non-Christian system. This was recognized by A. C. Underwood in his book *Conversion Christian and non-Christian* [1925], but the book was not quite adequate to its subject, and is now both out of print and out of date. The best known example under this heading is that of al-Ghazzali, and here we have the advantage that the experience has been personally recorded by one of the outstanding philosophical geniuses known to human history.

3. There may be conversion from a secular to a spiritual understanding of the universe. Something like this seems to have happened to Motilal Nehru, the father of Jawaharlal, when he took up with the national movement directed by M. K. Gandhi. The elder Nehru, a most successful lawyer, was a *bon vivant*, who sent his shirts to Paris every week because he was convinced that no laundry in India could deal with them to his satisfaction. There exists a most interesting account of the simplification of life that he adopted as more suitable to one committed to the national cause.

4. There is the phenomenon of conversion from a non-Christian to the Christian system of belief and practice.

5. There is the contrary phenomenon of the abandonment of the Christian system in favour of some other, which may be Marxist or Islamic or generally atheistic.

6. There is the phenomenon, within the Christian world, of conversion from nominal adherence to passionate commitment.

Our two illegitimate usages are:
7. Mere transition from one religious community

to another, without radical change of conviction or practice.

8. Movement from one section of the Christian Church to another... Quite recently the Roman Catholic Church, in its form for the reception of Christian believers into full communion with the Church, has rejected the use of the words 'convert' and 'conversion', and no longer stigmatizes as heresy the form of Christian belief formerly professed by the believer. This is a movement towards a better understanding of terms, as well as an easement of conscience for those distressed by the earlier usage.

In this article we shall be mainly concerned, for reasons of length, with conversion to, or within, the Christian fellowship.

The last great book on the subject of conversion was William James' *Varieties of Religious Experience*, which appeared in 1903... James' work has been criticized on the ground that in reality he dealt only with one variety of religious experience. It is true that James, like his brother Henry, could never be anything other than what he was by inheritance, a New England Protestant. But the criticism is not wholly fair. James was very widely read, and did draw on sources beyond the limits of his own sympathies. And, unlike many philosophers, he was a stylist of more than ordinary merit. As a result, his book can still be read with pleasure and profit. But naturally many things have changed in three quarters of a century; we are faced with problems of which James was unaware, and materials of which he knew nothing are available in very large quantities. If we are to have another great book, worthy to stand on the shelves by the side of the work of James, it seems to me that there are three areas which would need far fuller treatment than was given to them in the earlier book.

I. We now know a great deal more about ourselves than was known at the beginning of this century. No one today could write on religious experience without taking note of the fact that Sigmund Freud has lived and written. James was by profession a psychologist, and was rather surprisingly well informed about recent developments outside his own field of specialization. Freud began to publish only in 1894, and ten years later was hardly known in England; but James seems to have had a pretty good idea of what was going on. Of course there have been a great many developments, and a great many others have written on religion from the psychological point of view. But Freud must be the starting point. No less than Columbus he must be regarded as the discoverer of a new world. His answers were almost invariably wrong; but he did ask a great many of the questions that needed to be asked, and in particular he made us all aware of the significance of hidden conflict in our being, and of the way in which such conflicts underlie

a great many of the observable phenomena of human behaviour.

Such a psycho-analytic approach to religion must be handled very carefully. Psychiatrists make so many immense mistakes in diagnosing the troubles of patients whom they have often had sitting, or lying, before them, that a very critical eye must be turned on their findings when these relate to persons no longer living. Erik Erikson's book *Young Man Luther* [1958] has achieved a reputation greater probably than it deserved; Professor R. H. Bainton has shewn on how very narrow a foundation of evidence Erikson's structure has been built up. If so very tall a tower of Babel has been built on so shaky a foundation, it is likely that the foundation may give way at one point or another, and the tower prove to be after all a leaning tower of Pisa. In a recent number of the *Harvard Theological Review* [1977], an American scholar has applied the same methods to the Protestant martyr under Queen Mary, John Bradford. I have found his reasoning quite unconvincing. Certainly the sixteenth century was a period of great strains and anxieties. No wonder, after the experiences of the Renaissance and the Reformation, the discovery of America and of the sea-route to India, the disruption of the European economy by the silver that poured in from Mexico and a great many other causes. Among both Roman Catholics and Protestants we find at times a desire for suffering, usually taking the form of a desire to follow as closely as possible the suffering Redeemer. This is to be sharply distinguished from the desire for punishment or expiation, which is a well-known pathological symptom.

This is not, however, to say that the psychological path should not be followed. The great service rendered by Freud is in helping us to distinguish between good and bad religion. He saw that much that passes as religion can be interpreted in terms of human fears and desires. This is true; and such religion is always to be understood as bad religion. The primal defect which lies heavy on us all is self-centredness. Religion can be a refined form of self-centredness; it is all too easy for man to attempt to turn God into a convenient satellite to his own existence, and when he is devoutly saying 'Thy will be done', to be meaning in his heart, 'My will be done, and please be quick about it'. At this point Freud is the true friend and ally no less of the pastor than of the physician. But when the dross or false religion has been consumed, the gold of true religion remains.

It must be regretted that so little that can truthfully be called scientific has been done in this field. Perhaps Karl Menninger's book with the engaging title *Whatever became of Sin?* [1975] may be the sign that better days are coming. We need many close-up studies of that re-integration of personality to be

found in any experience to which the term 'conversion' can properly be applied.

II. Our second field for extension is the conversion of adherents of non-Christian faiths to faith in Jesus Christ. Here it must be stressed that such conversions are of interest chiefly when the convert has been a strongly convinced adherent of the other faith, and yields only with reluctance, and even agony, to what he has come to be convinced are the higher claims of Jesus Christ. James of course knew something of American missionary work abroad, but he would not have claimed to be an expert in this field. And a great deal of the evidence now before us was simply not available seventy-five years ago.

One of the great difficulties in this area of study is that it is so difficult to get authentic accounts of conversion in earlier days directly from those who have experienced them. The records of the Jesuit missionaries in India are full of interesting stories of conversions. But in every case these are recorded by the missionaries; we see them through their eyes, and every such record, however honest in intention the recorder may have been, is subtly changed because seen through the eyes of a foreigner and not interpreted from within. One of the best known of these stories is that of a Muslim princess, kept in strict *purdah* in Goa, whose first acquaintance with the Christian faith came from hearing the schoolboys singing Christian songs in the streets on their way home from school. This story is well-known because it has found its way into many of the books written about that period. We are fortunate in that, through the publication of Fr. Josef Wicki's *Documenta Indica* we can now read the original report, as it came from the lively pen of the young aristocrat Luis Frois, later to be the historian of the mission to Japan. The story is indeed dramatic; but once again we do not hear the voice of the princess herself, but only of those who undertook to tell her tale to others.

At a rather later date, the records of the famous Madura mission guided by Robert de Nobili (in India 1606-1656) give us many stories of conversion; a number of these are set forth in Vincent Cronin's well-written but rather journalistic account of the great Jesuit, *A Pearl to India* [1959]. But all these are recorded by the missionaries; I have never found a single account actually written by one of the converts; and these Jesuit narratives are often marked by a tendency to make a good story better.

When we reach the nineteenth century, the situation is very different. A number of the converts were literate in a western language, and could write clearly of their experiences. For instance, the convert from Islam Imad-ud-Din, given the degree of D.D. for his translation work, has left a sensitive account of his conversion. Fr. Jarrett-Kerr has made a good beginning in his *Patterns of Christian Acceptance*

[1972]. But even on these personal narratives the critical spirit must be allowed to play; converts often wrote in the pious terms they had learnt from their missionary friends; many of them were not skilled in self-analysis, and again and again they leave out just the things that we would like to know. An immense work of sifting, sorting and classification remains to be done. As converts have been won from every known form of religion, and on every level of culture, if this work is well done the results are likely to be most illuminating.

III. Our third field is that of conversions in adult life. If ever it was possible to suggest that conversion is an adolescent phenomenon, the twentieth century has put paid to all that. We have a considerable number of records of those who in mature years have come to Christian faith from unbelief, or mere conformity, of many different types.

In the Orthodox world, two of the best known examples are Nicolas Berdaev (1874-1948) and Serge Bulgakov (1871-1944), both of them writers well known in the English-speaking world. On the Roman Catholic side the two names that spring immediately to mind are those of Jacques Maritain (1882-1973) and Gabriel Marcel, both of them philosophers but not by any means out of exactly the same drawer.

One of the earliest and most interesting examples known to me from Germany is that of Johann Georg Hamann (1730-88). Sitting in his lonely room in London, and reading the book of Deuteronomy, Hamann suddenly realized that the Lord had spoken directly to him. When he returned to Königsberg, his family were so horrified that anything of the kind should have happened to one of their own that they asked Magister Immanuel Kant of the University to reason with the convert and to bring him back to his senses. It did not work.

In England the list is long. The best known of course are T. S. Eliot and C. S. Lewis, the latter having told us in some detail of his pilgrimage in his book *Surprised by Joy* [1955].

By way of illustration I may mention three cases particularly well known to me.

Frances Cornford the poetess was a granddaughter of Charles Darwin, and had been brought up to believe that religion was good for some people but not for Darwins. (This is delicately brought out in Gwen Raverat's charming book *Period Piece: a Cambridge Childhood* [1952].) Francis, who was one of my teachers, and Frances managed to produce some of the most beautiful children I have ever seen; my heart is still sore over the futile death of John, fighting for the communist cause in Spain. When the children began to ask questions, why other children went to church and they never did, Frances rightly thought that the best plan was to go back to the source. Not long after, she said to another of my

teachers, "Mr. Angus, I've been reading the New Testament, and I find that the things Jesus said about God are true'. Just like that. Not long afterwards she was baptized and confirmed in the Church of England.

Martin Charlesworth (1895-1950) was a well-known classical scholar, contributor of many chapters to the *Cambridge Ancient History*, a Hellenist, a man of great integrity, devoted to the welfare of his students, but not a believer. When he was in his forties, I heard to my intense surprise that he had been ordained to the Anglican ministry. We never discussed the matter in detail, but I gathered that, in trying to help some student who was in deep trouble, he had been faced by the challenge of the woman of Samaria, 'Sir, thou hast nothing to draw with and the well is deep'. In conversation he once said without the least trace of embarrassment, 'Yes, that was before my conversion'. I once heard one of the most eminent Anglicans now living say, in answer to a question, 'I went up to Cambridge as an unbeliever, and then there was a man . . .'; then he stopped, unable to continue. I ventured to ask him in private, 'Was the man's name Charlesworth?' and he said 'Yes'. I felt that if, in the ten years granted to him as a Christian, Martin had done nothing but bring that one friend to the knowledge of Jesus Christ, he had not lived in vain.

The other day a Lieutenant Commander in the Indian navy came to see me. I remember him well as a very troublesome boy. Then in 1952 he came to see me in London, and reported an experience a little like that of Hamann. Sitting alone on New Year's eve, he began to think of the passing of time, and that for the years that he had lived he really had nothing to show. Then without any human intervention, he saw that there could be a meaning and purpose in life such

as he had never known. His latest exploit as a Christian has been to give away Russian Bibles in Vladivostok, of all places.

As far as I know no book has yet been written on conversions of this type. There is a good deal of evidence in print, and since many of the people concerned are still alive, the written materials can be supplemented by the methods of oral history. The study would be fascinating, especially since so many of those converted in later years are people of notable distinction and in many cases extremely articulate and uninhibited in the discussion of how they came to faith and how they have tried to live it out. I live at present in a theological college in which perhaps half of the students are 'new believers', who have come to faith without any previous Christian background in home or school — an interesting field for primary observation.

Where, then, is the contemporary William James, who will do for our day what the philosopher did for his? Perhaps the time has not yet come for the one great book to be written. As I have indicated, much of the material has never been explored, let alone scientifically studied. Perhaps we need a number of preliminary surveys in the three areas about which I have specially written, not forgetting that investigation of conversions in earlier years might, through the application of modern methods of study, yield interesting results. And then the time might come when the genius with special synthetic power should appear, and bring the whole together in one majestic survey. We shall be lucky if that genius has the same command of style and of vivid presentation as William James. In that case we really would have a memorable book, and there would be very few whose understanding of the Christian faith would not be enlarged by the reading of it.

BIBLICAL FAITH AND THE CHALLENGE OF RELIGIOUS PLURALISM

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The challenge to Christian theology from the world religions is becoming increasingly evident. In today's global situation, Christians find themselves in a minority position confronted by claims to the truth about God that conflict with their own. Theologians who try to ignore these claims are working in a vacuum away from the realities of today's world. Furthermore, theologians who expend their energy combating and denying the claims of people of other religions are cutting themselves off from opportunities to enrich their own faith.

There is a biblical precedent for dealing with other religions. The theologians whose work we find in the Bible took the stories and concepts of other religions such as the Babylonians and the Greeks and transformed them and made them a part of the tradition about the one God. Because of the openness of the biblical theologians to some of the ideas of other religions, new meaning and richness were added to the biblical faith. The willingness of Christian theologians today to meet the challenge of the world religions in a manner open to dialogue and to wrestle with the claims of the other religions is, therefore, in the biblical tradition.

The problem confronting Christian theologians when dealing with other religions is the relationship of the universal and particular claims of the Christian religion. Christ is sent for the salvation of all the world (John 3:17) and yet there is salvation in no other name than that of Jesus Christ (Acts 4:12). The relationship of the universal to the particular in the Christian faith needs to be re-examined in an age in which we have come to realize that no one religion is likely to become the one religion of the world. As Christian theologians confront their task, they must be faithful to the Christian tradition in such a way that what they say is recognizably Christian, and yet be true to the traditions of other religions so that Muslims, for example, will recognize what is said of their religion to be a true expression of Islam.

In the following, I will examine briefly three recent Christian approaches to the world religions and then look at several biblical passages for insights into the problems presented by religious pluralism. Finally I will offer the concept of the Spirit as an aid in dealing with the relationship of the universal and the particular in the Christian religion in light of the challenge of the world religions.

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Three recent Christian approaches

In reaction to what Peter Beyerhaus called the humanistic turn that the World Council of Churches has taken with regard to mission, he wrote the Frankfurt Declaration. It was accepted with revision on March 4, 1970, by the Theological Convention, an association of confession-minded theologians. This statement, according to Beyerhaus, was issued to "clarify the true missionary motives and goals of the Church of Jesus Christ".¹

The Frankfurt Declaration has now been translated into English and has been circulated in North America. It has received enthusiastic response from those who bear the label "evangelicals". Modeled upon the Barmen Declaration, this document presents seven basic elements of mission, each beginning with an excerpt from scripture, a statement of affirmation, and a statement of condemnation.

On the basis of Acts 4:12, "And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (RSV), the Frankfurt Declaration states that all non-Christians must be challenged to believe in Christ and be baptized in his name. Opposed is the false teaching that Christ is anonymously so evident in the world that people can encounter him and hence find salvation without direct exposure to and acceptance of the Gospel.

John 3:16 and II Corinthians 5:20 are the grounds of the statement that only through belief in Jesus Christ and baptism does one obtain eternal life. The rejection of the offer of salvation in Jesus Christ leads to damnation. Thus the declaration condemns the attitude that through the Christ event people have already been "born again" and "have peace with him" without explicit knowledge of God's saving act in history.

The Roman Catholic theologian Karl Rahner presented his position in the relationship of Christianity to the other world religions in a pre-Vatican II lecture in April of 1961.²

In Rahner's view, God desires the salvation of all humankind. This gift of salvation can be found in many forms and under various labels. Two positions which should not be taken towards non-Christian religions are: that everything contained in them comes from God, or that they are entirely human constructions. Before the Gospel is presented to them, people have the right and the duty to live their relationship to God within the religious and social realities of their particular historical situation.

According to Rahner, all salvation is Christ's salvation. It follows that non-Christians who have a knowledge of God's salvation are, in fact, "anony-

¹ Peter Beyerhaus, *Missions: Which Way Humanization or Redemption*, trans. Margaret Clarkson (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1971), p. 109.

² Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigation: Later Writings*, Vol. V. trans. Karl H. Kruger (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1966).

mous Christians". People are anonymous Christians both in their origin, since all grace comes from Christ, and in their orientation. All people have an internal, dynamic orientation to Christ and to the Church, for it is only here that they can become fully conscious of who God is and what it means to respond to God's grace. Once the Christian message is presented to people, with sufficient clarity and through the concepts and structures of their society and culture, they are obliged to embrace Christianity. For Rahner, Christ remains the final and normative revelation.

John Hick, a British Protestant, philosopher of religion, compares the point of view assumed by Christian attempts to deal with other religions with the Ptolemaic view of the universe.³ Hick is looking for a "Copernican revolution" in this matter. As the Copernican revolution asserted that the sun and not the earth is the centre of the universe, so a revolution is needed in theology that causes a shift from the belief that Christianity is the centre to the realization that God is at the centre. The religions of humankind revolve around and serve God.

Hick believes that there are different world religions because at the time revelation began to be perceived, the world was fragmented. People responded differently to revelation because of their different cultural situations. The conflicting truth-claims of the various religions arise, because like the blind men touching the elephant, the view of the truth differs according to the part of the elephant each touches. It may well be, according to Hick, that each religion's account of the divine may be true in that it represents a genuine encounter with the divine. These encounters, however, are expressed in historically and culturally determined, inadequate, human analogies. No one religion, therefore, has the whole truth about the divine. The nature of the infinite cannot be grasped by the finite.

Hick does not think that all views of the divine reality are equally valid; yet each view is an expression of an encounter with the divine. Thus for Hick, the different accounts of the divine are expressions of an encounter of the same reality but with different focused awareness of that reality.

These three approaches give us some idea of the range of responses Christian theologians have made to the challenge of the world religions. At the heart of the challenge is the need to examine the relation of the universal to the particular in the Bible. A re-examination of scripture may provide ways of meeting other religions that avoid the extremes of exclusivism or relativism.

A re-examination of scripture

I would like to turn to two passages of scripture that appear exclusivistic, *Acts* 4: 12 and *John* 14: 6. First I will examine *Acts* 4: 12, "And there is sal-

³ John Hick, *God and the Universe of Faith: Essays in the Philosophy of Religion* (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1973).

vation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (RVS).

The Christians at the time of the author of *Acts*, between 60 and 90 C.E., had accepted the delay of the Parousia and understood the present time as the time of the Spirit. Their task in this time was to preach the Word of God to the ends of the earth so that all might know God's salvation (*Acts* 1: 8; 13: 47).

According to Ernst Haenchen, Luke's theological position can be understood in this context. God has created the world and has control over the salvation of humankind. God raised Jesus from the dead, placed him on God's right hand, and ordained Jesus to judge the living and the dead (*Acts* 10: 42). To be saved, it is necessary, therefore, to believe in Jesus as Lord and to be a part of the community that calls on his name.⁴ "And it shall be that whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved" (*Acts* 2: 21). When the name of Jesus is spoken, God acts to heal (4: 10), to forgive sins (10: 43), and hence to save human beings (4: 12). At the same time, Luke's theology included the acknowledgment that no one who is doing the healing work of God should be rebuked (*Luke* 9: 44-5). The stranger who casts out demons in Jesus' name, yet does not belong to the group of Jesus' disciples, is nevertheless an instrument of God's healing love.⁵

With Luke's position in mind, let us look at the passage under discussion. Peter and John are in Jerusalem on the way to the Temple. In the name of Jesus of Nazareth, Peter heals a lame man and causes a stir among the people. As Peter and John are speaking to the people, the priests and the Sadducees have them arrested. The next day the Jewish opponents of the Christians gather and an inquiry begins. Peter and John are asked: "By what power or by what name did you do this?" (4: 7).

In the beginning of his reply (verse 9), Peter uses *sozo*, a word that has a double meaning in Greek. *Sozo* can mean to save as well as to heal.⁶ The lame man is healed by the name of Jesus. The word Jesus comes from the Hebrew Jehoshua or Joshua, which translates "Yahweh or God-saves". *Soteria* in verse 12 means both physical and spiritual deliverance. The emphasis in this passage is on the saving power of the name. The passage is a confession of faith. In the New Testament, "calling upon the name of Christ" is found in confessional statements that form a part of the liturgical material of the early Church.⁷ This statement is an affirmation of the community of believers that Jesus Christ is the name through which they have

⁴ Ernst Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1971), p. 92.

⁵ G. B. Caird, *The Gospel of St Luke* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1963), pp. 135-6.

⁶ For other examples see *Luke* 8: 48; 17: 19; 18: 42; *Acts* 14: 9.

⁷ Rudolf Bultman, *Theology of the New Testament*, Vol. I, trans. Kendrick Grobel (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951), pp. 125-128. See also pp. 133-140.

exper. ed salvation. Thus the language used in this passage is confessional in nature. According to Krister Stendahl, confessional language is not metaphysical language. Christians, in using such language, were not making absolute, final statements about the nature of reality.⁸

In the theology of *Luke-Acts*, the universal sovereignty of God is maintained. The salvation-history perspective utilizes language which seems to be exclusivistic and limiting, but the primary concern of this perspective is the expression of the source of salvation and the end of God's saving activity, the renewal of all humanity.

In talking about the language of any religion when the subject is the mode of revelation, what is important is not the means of disclosure, but the end in view, the knowledge of God and the salvation it brings. It is dangerous to translate confessional statements into metaphysical categories or absolute truths. The content of such language as that of *Acts* 4:12, therefore, was meant to affirm that Jesus is the source of salvation for the Christian community and not necessarily to deny that others might be vehicles of God's saving grace. Thus the confession of faith that in Jesus Christ God has acted for the salvation of humanity is not in itself an absolute statement that God has not nor cannot act in such a way elsewhere.

I would suggest that views such as Haenchen's, which speaks of the necessity of a person's belonging to the community that calls on the name of Jesus Christ for salvation, be re-examined in light of positions such as Stendahl's which point out the confessional nature of the language of the Gospel.

John 14:6 reads: "Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life, no one comes to the father, but by me'" (RVS).

The *Gospel of John* was written probably between 90 and 100 C.E. by an unknown author whose purpose is stated in his gospel: "Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book, but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name" (*John* 20:30-31). Although this verse does not tell us whether the author was writing to help believers or to convert non-believers, he does write to re-affirm his conviction that Jesus is the Son of God and the bearer of new life. This is not "scientific" history, but interpretative history. The author's

⁸ These ideas were expressed by Stendahl at the Consultation on Christ's Lordship and Religious Pluralism at Union Theological Seminary in Virginia held October 24-27, 1979. See also Stendahl's remarks to be included in a Spring 1981 publication of the conference papers by Orbis Press. See also F. F. Bruce, who has suggested that the emphasis is on the saving effect of Jesus' name and not on the ineffectualness of some other name for salvation. *The Acts of the Apostles: The Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary* (London: The Tyndale Press, 1951), p. 121. See also Floyd H. Ross' article in Gerald H. Anderson, ed., *The Theology of the Christian Mission* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1961), pp. 222-224. In Ross' view, the statement of *Acts* 4:12 is a mythic-confessional statement.

purpose is theological, not chronological. The Jesus portrayal in this narrative is not just an earthly man but the incarnate word of God. Jesus is the mediator between God and human beings. He is the source of salvation. "For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him" (*John* 3:17). The Son is the light of the world who came to every human being (*John* 1:4-9).

The context of *John* 14:6 is the last meal Jesus would share with his disciples. Jesus is portrayed as knowing he is to die. He is in the process of preparing his disciples for this event and his return to God. Thomas' question (verse 5): "Lord, we do not know where you are going; how can we know the way?" (RVS) evokes the reply from Jesus: "I am the way, and the truth; and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me" (14:6, RVS). Jesus is the way to God. The path which Jesus will take to God is that of crucifixion and resurrection. Jesus will then be involved in the dying and the rising of all Christians. Because he is the means of access to God who is truth and life, Jesus is truth and life for all people.

The truth in the Gospel of John is the revelation of God through Jesus. This revelation is saving. It frees people from their bondage to sin (*John* 8:31 ff). Jesus as the truth, therefore, is the fulfiller and the revealer of God's salvific purpose. Similarly, as the means by which God bestows life on the world, Jesus is the life.

Unlike the claims of some of the mystery religions of John's day, John states that there is no access to God, the truth and the life, except through the historical reality of Jesus. Only Jesus who came from heaven and who returned to heaven can mediate between God and human beings.⁹

If C. K. Barrett is correct in his assertion that John used some of the language and concepts of the mystery religions yet believed these religions were ineffective,¹⁰ then one of John's purposes in this verse may have been to refute the claims of direct communion with God made by these religions. This purpose may be one reason why his statement regarding Jesus' salvific effect sounds so exclusivistic to the modern ear. When one has opponents, one often turns to strong statements to defend a position. The struggle of the early Christians for credibility and survival may account for a great deal of the exclusivity found in the New Testament writings.

Gregory Baum calls the exclusivistic language of the early Church regarding salvation "survival language". The language of survival and self-identity always modifies the truth and changes in character when uttered by those in power, according to Baum. Words spoken by a threatened community under the hostile Roman Empire in the midst of competing reli-

⁹ For further elaboration of these points see C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text* (London: S.P.C.K., 1958).

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 382.

ious groups, must be reformulated now that this exclusivistic language is the language of the community in power. Baum thinks that "... the Christian Church cannot go on repeating the absolute claims of New Testament and ancient Church teaching without becoming unfaithful to their original meaning".¹¹

Another possible cause of New Testament exclusivism in this passage and in other New Testament passages is the enthusiasm of early Christians. The followers of Jesus and the early converts to Christianity believed they had found the way to God, and in their eagerness they often rejected opponents of Jesus. Later this rejection became generalized into a negative appraisal of all non-Christians.

In trying to understand these exclusivistic passages, we also need to keep in mind that the early Christians were ignorant of such religions as Buddhism, and Hinduism, and, of course, could not have known Islam. The biblical writers were aware of some pagan cults and Judaism. The Jews, however, were portrayed first as opponents of Jesus and then in Luke and Paul as opponents of the primitive church. The exclusivistic attitudes of the New Testament writers, therefore, may be due in part to their lack of knowledge of the rich religious heritage of humankind that we know today.

The intent of the biblical writers must also be kept in mind. The Old Testament authors, for the most part, were interested in telling the story of God and of God's relationship to the people of Israel. The New Testament authors wrote to tell the good news of God's saving action in Jesus Christ. They had discovered what was to them the way to God. They had found a life of love, freedom, and service that made them feel that they were, in the words of the *Gospel of John*, born again. Their primary purpose was to share this new life, to confess the faith that they believed could change the world. They were not, therefore, concerned with the modern question of whether or not God is working through religions other than Christianity for the salvation of humankind.

The Bible, nevertheless, as a basic source of Christian theology, must be examined. Furthermore, the exclusivistic biblical passages must be dealt with. There are, however, passages in the Old and New Testaments that present a more universalistic picture of God's saving activity. In *Genesis* 9, God makes a covenant with Noah and every living creature of the earth. *Genesis* 12: 1-3 tells of Yahweh's covenant with Abraham. Through a particular man and his descendants, Israel, God will offer salvation to all humankind.

¹¹ Charles W. Forman and Gregory Baum, "Is There a Missionary Message?" *Mission Trends* No. 1: *Crucial Issues in Mission Today*, ed. Gerald H. Anderson and Thomas F. Stransky (New York: Paulist Press, 1974), p. 84.

Amos 9: 7 also presents a universalistic outlook. To the Israelites their salvation was assured because Yahweh had led them out of Egypt and had made a covenant with them, Amos addresses the words of 9: 7: "Are not you and the Cushites all the same to me, sons of Israel?—it is Yahweh who speaks. Did not I, who brought Israel out of the land of Egypt, bring the Philistines from Caphtor, and the Aramaeans from Kir?" These distant peoples, some of whom were Israel's enemies, are the same to Yahweh as Israel. They each had an Exodus or a migration, and Yahweh was in charge of all of them. This passage shows that Israel is not the only people guided by Yahweh.

Amos' message is radical. Yahweh is God of all nations. Israel's relationship with Yahweh is only one aspect of God's universal sovereignty. God's saving presence is not limited to one group of people.

As the Old Testament tells of God's salvific work through a particular people, so the New Testament speaks of God's salvific work effected by a particular person. Some New Testament passages offer a universalistic outlook. Jesus heals the daughter of a Gentile in *Mark* 7: 24-30 (*Matthew* 15: 21-28). Here he is depicted as having compassion for all humankind. Jesus does not draw the line at fellow Jews.

In *Matthew* 7: 21 Jesus is portrayed as saying, "Not every one who says to me, 'Lord, Lord', shall enter the kingdom of heaven." This passage seems to indicate that a confession of Jesus' Lordship is not the criterion for entrance into the kingdom of heaven. The criterion is rather the doing of God's will. According to *Matthew* 25: 31-46, the basis of judgement is how a person responds to the hungry, the naked, the sick, and the imprisoned. For at the last judgement, all people will be judged on the basis of whether or not they ministered to others who were in distress.¹² In *Matthew* 25: 31-46, those who responded to the need of their neighbour were not conscious of their ministry to the Master. This text speaks of disinterested good will, of love that acts without any expectation of a return on that love. Love of God and neighbour is shown most concretely in love of one's fellow human beings. Thus it is not surprisingly that in the Matthean perspective, all of the law and the prophets were summed up in the command to love God and one's neighbour (*Matthew* 22: 37-40).¹³ The emphasis in

¹² Joachim Jeremias understands this passage to be discussing the judgement of all the nations of the world. The brethren in this passage are all the afflicted and needy. According to Jeremias, this pericope is concerned with a question regarding the criterion by which the heathen will be judged. At the last judgement, the heathen will be examined concerning their acts of love shown to Jesus through the form of those in need. They will be granted a place in the Kingdom if they have the duty of love. *The Parables of Jesus* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons: 1963), pp. 206-210. Cf. Hendrickus Boers, *Theology Out of the Ghetto: A New Testament Exegetical Study Concerning Religious Exclusiveness* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1971), pp. 63-73.

¹³ Victor Paul Furnish attributes the command to love to Jesus and suggests that this specific two-fold commandment came from Jesus. *The Love Command in the New Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1972), p. 24.

these passages is on love of one's fellow human beings and not on correct doctrinal beliefs.

The *Gospel of John* presents Jesus as saviour of the world (John 3:17). He is recognized as such by the Samaritans in *John* 4:1-42. In *Acts* 17:22-31, Luke has Paul address the Greeks at the Areopagus with a universal message. God is the God of all peoples and gives to them their life and all that they have.

Paul's emphasis on the freedom and sovereignty of God in *Romans* 9:14-29 is a corrective to Christians who think salvation is limited to them. Salvation is a gift granted through the independence and freedom of divine choice.

In *Romans* 3:27-4:25, Paul carefully works out his position on salvation through faith. It is Abraham's faith, not his works, that causes him to be judged righteous. Thus salvation is not limited to those who follow the law but is offered to all who have faith. The faith that Paul calls for, however, is a confession that Jesus is Lord and that God raised him from the dead (Rom. 19:9). In this passage, Paul has made a strong case against any one religious group having a special claim on God's salvific grace. Paul's line of reasoning pushed to its logical conclusion would indicate that Christians have no special access to salvation. Paul, however, filled with the spirit of the risen Christ and the understanding that his mission is to proclaim the good news of salvation through Christ, could never reach this conclusion.¹⁴

The Bible presents many problems to an interpretation of the universal-particular relationship that would make possible an open and positive stance to the religions of the world. The overall reason for these problems is that the Bible is the story of God's working out his salvific will through Israel and through Jesus of Nazareth. The areas of concern for the biblical writers are not, nor could they have been, how a Christian should relate to a Buddhist. The Bible is the crucial point, however, at which theologians must begin their re-examination of the Christian tradition in light of religious pluralism. Helpful concepts may emerge from scrutiny of biblical texts.

The concept of the Spirit

I would like to offer the concept of the Spirit as a possible aid to dealing with the relationship of the universal claims of Christianity to its particularity. I am not dealing here with the doctrine of the Holy Spirit as the third

¹⁴ There are scholars, on the other hand, such as E. P. Sanders who think that Paul was convinced that those who believed in Christ would be saved and that those who did not would be destroyed. E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1977), pp. 447-474.

person of the Trinity but with the concept of the Spirit in the Bible.¹⁵ Here the Spirit is used for the activity of God in history and creation. The Old Testament *ruah*, spirit, wind, or breath, is used synonymously in several cases with *panim*, the face or presence of Yahweh.

We read in *Psalms* 139: "Where could I go to escape your spirit? Where could I flee from your presence?" Our knowledge of Hebrew parallelism tells us that here these two concepts are interchangeable. *Psalms* 51:11 says: "Cast me not away from Thy presence, and take not Thy Holy Spirit from me." (RVS). God's presence, therefore, can be known through the Spirit.

In the Bible, the Spirit of God is present in an active manner. Presence is not being, it is action. In Hebrew the verb "to be", from which the name Yahweh is taken, is a transitive verb. The best translation of the Tetragrammaton which is most likely the hiphil or causative form of the verb "to be" is "I shall cause to be what I shall cause to be". Yahweh is the doer, the actor, the maker of the world and history.

The Spirit of Yahweh was active at creation and continues to act in history for a purpose. This purpose is salvific. When the Spirit is poured out, the desert will become an orchard and peace will be the order of the day (Is. 32:15-18). The bestowal of the Spirit brings salvation. Often salvation is preceded by judgement, as the exiles in Babylon came to understand. Yet the function of judgement is salvific. "My spirit is in the midst of you, be not afraid" (Hag. 2:5).¹⁶

In the New Testament, the Spirit descends on Jesus at baptism and on the Church at Pentecost. For Luke, the age of the Spirit is the time of salvation. Paul understood the purpose of Jesus' entire mission to be a bestowal of the Spirit, which Paul equates with salvation. The presence of the Spirit in the Church is a sign of the salvation to come. The Spirit for Paul is that power which involves a person in the saving act of God through Jesus Christ.¹⁷

Through the Spirit, the Church experiences the presence of God. This does not mean, however, that the Spirit is contained by the Church. The Bible tells us that the Spirit of a free and sovereign God is elusive. *John* 3:8 reads: "The wind (*pneuma*) blows wherever it pleases; you hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going." The Spirit fell on the household of Cornelius, unbaptized Gentiles (Acts 10:44-5). This unexpected occurrence amazed Peter. In the Old Testament, the Spirit

¹⁵ The following discussion of the Spirit is not intended to be an exhaustive examination of the Spirit in the Bible, but an introduction to the concept. The problem of the relationship of the Spirit to the Christ is complex, and I have not attempted to deal with this relationship here.

¹⁶ It should be noted that there is a strand in the Old Testament that attributes an Evil Spirit to Yahweh. This is a result of the monotheizing process found among the Old Testament writers. Later the author of the book of Job uses the concept "Satan" to account for evil.

¹⁷ Edward Schweizer, *Spirit of God*, trans. A. E. Harvey (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1960), pp. 56-84.

of Yahweh descended on Saul (I Sam. 10:11), but Saul disobeyed Yahweh and the Spirit left him (I Sam. 16:14). No person or institution can possess the Spirit. It blows where it pleases. We human beings do not know the mind of God. We can neither predict where the Spirit of God will move nor control the movement of God's Spirit. We must re-examine our thinking when it leads us to believe that God's Spirit is a possession of the Church.

The Spirit works through particular individuals and groups of people. Certain judges, kings, and prophets, the people Israel, Jesus, and finally the Church are recipients of the Spirit. But when the Spirit is bestowed on a particular people or individual, the purpose is universal. *Isaiah* 42:1 reads: "Here is my servant whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom my soul delights. I have endowed him with my spirit that he may bring true justice to the nations." "Nations" is plural. The Spirit works through Israel for the benefit of all people and not just for Israel's sake.

In the same manner, the Church becomes an instrument through which the Spirit can work for the salvation of all. Peter addresses the crowd at Pentecost with the quotation from Joel that says: "In the days to come — it is the Lord who speaks — I will pour out my spirit on all mankind" (Acts 2:17). The passage does not say, "I will pour out my Spirit only on those who belong to the Church."

It is important to notice that in the New Testament, there is no suggestion that the Spirit departed from Israel in order to descend on the Church. The Spirit of God in the Bible is in no way limited. The bestowal of the Spirit on the Church did not somehow exhaust the Spirit. On the contrary, the Bible speaks of the Spirit as capable of moving among all peoples regardless of their religious affiliation. The Spirit, as presented in the Bible, works through particular instruments for the sake of all humankind.

I have offered the Spirit as a biblical concept that may be useful in dealing with the dilemma of the universal and the particular claims of the Christian faith in our religiously plural world. The Bible presents the Spirit as present in history in a saving manner. The Spirit is elusive and capable of moving among all humankind. Because of the nature of the Spirit, the concept opens up possibilities for new insights into the universal-particular problem of Christianity. I present these ideas on the Spirit, not as a finished product, but as possible guidelines for further inquiry into ways to meet the challenge from the world religions.

Christian theologians are confronted with a difficult task as they try to work out the relationship of the Christian religion to the other world religions.¹⁸ We have seen that some theologians, when confronted by religious

¹⁸ The question of religious pluralism might be considered from the point of view of religious ethics. One could inquire into the possibility that much of the exclusivism of the biblical writers was due to a reaction against the immortality of the non-Hebraic and non-Christian world.

pluralism, take an exclusivistic view of God's gift of salvation. These theologians base their ideas on biblical passages such as *Acts* 4:12 and *John* 14:6. We have seen, however, that after careful examination these passages are not necessarily as exclusivistic as they appear at first glance. Furthermore, there are biblical passages that provide a more universalistic outlook.

A theologian should not resort to "proof texting" one position or the other for it is apparent that either an exclusivistic or universalistic position could be supported by isolated biblical passages. My intention has been to demonstrate that there are universalistic passages in the Bible. Furthermore, I have attempted to show that exclusivistic passages can be viewed in a more universalistic manner by recognizing, for example, the confessional nature of some of these exclusivistic passages.

An exclusivistic theological approach to other religions, therefore, is not the only approach to other religions that is biblically grounded. An approach rooted in the more universalistic biblical passages and in the open attitude of those biblical writers who reshaped the ideas of other religions leads to an increased understanding and enrichment of one's own faith. A closed, exclusivistic posture, on the other hand, leads to isolationism and robs us of the possibility to enrich our faith from the ideas and concepts of other religions. This posture of openness, as we have seen, allows us to stand in the tradition of the biblical theologies.¹⁹

¹⁹ All biblical quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are from the Jerusalem Bible.

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THEOLOGY OF RELIGIOUS ENCOUNTER

MT533

Class Reader: Selected Essays

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TIME MAGAZINE

Lead Article of December 27, 1982

points up the Church's divided approach

to the basic issues

we will encounter in this course

A Letter from the Publisher

"Missionaries know an Asia seldom seen by journalists," said Bangkok Bureau Chief David DeVoss after this week's cover story on Christian workers overseas had taken him into isolated areas of Borneo and northern Thailand. He witnessed a baptism in a water-buffalo wallow and followed a troupe of Thai students who perform the Nativity for peasants. Eugene Morse and his brother Robert, both missionaries, led DeVoss to a mountain village for a Thanksgiving feast of pork-fried cabbage. And on one cold evening DeVoss accompanied a missionary into a thatch-roofed house and heard him address a dozen squatting men until early morning. Only when DeVoss was leaving did he discover that he had been sitting beneath a fetish shelf of bat wings and chicken feathers in the home of the village's demon priest.

Indeed, the story threw many TIME correspondents into unsettling situations. After spending five weeks in Central and South America, sidestepping bushmasters, vampire bats, tarantulas and poisonous caterpillars, New York Correspondent James Wilde began to absorb some of a missionary's faith. Ten times his plane braved door-mat-size jungle airstrips, and ten

times Wilde paled while local Christians prayed. Says he: "The missionaries' good luck, like their sense of fulfillment, is contagious. I have never met a group I liked more."

In Indonesia, Hong Kong Bureau Chief Sandra Burton watched a Mennonite missionary weigh bleating goats hung by their hoofs from a hook scale. And in the village of Mulia, in the untramped interior of Irian Jaya, the Indonesian half of New Guinea, she met Missionary Leon Dillinger, photographed for the cover by Roland Neveu.



Robert Morse, left, and brother Eugene, right, with DeVoss

Suffering from a mild spot of dysentery and a major dose of skepticism, New Delhi Bureau Chief Dean Brelis went to a fetid garbage collectors' dumping ground near Cairo to meet a saintly missionary, Sister Emmanuelle. "A reporter from TIME?" she asked. "What kind of joke is this?" Then she spotted the sloppily bandaged cut hand of Brelis' driver. She instantly fetched her first-aid kit, cleaned the wound and applied a fresh bandage. Says Brelis: "Somehow, in her company, one thinks less of one's discomforts and more of other people's needs. The garbage collectors' world seemed a little less imperfect for her presence, and that, I think, is a miracle for this day and age."

John A. Meyers

Religion

COVER STORY

The New Missionary

Proclaiming Christ's message in daring and disputed ways

In Zaïre, Lester Green, 45, a Protestant missionary, climbs out of his Land Rover near the village of Lolwa, deep inside the Ituri rain forest. In fluent Ki-Swahili, he asks where he might find the Walese Pygmy tribes. Soon a guide is hacking his way through the dense undergrowth. Green follows, Bible in hand.

In Botswana, Randy Ewert, 25, and his wife Roxie, 24, American Mennonites, camp under canvas for days at a time while crossing the forbidding Kalahari Desert, bringing modern farming methods to impoverished nomadic Bushmen.

In Nepal, Milwaukee-born Father John Dahlheimer, 57, a Jesuit missionary, counsels refugees fleeing Tibet in search of religious freedom. Though he and the 366 other Christian workers in this officially Hindu land obey the law against proselytizing, their example has inspired more than 3,000 Nepalese to convert since 1954.

In the Philippines, Father Brian Gore of Perth, Australia, has been charged by the Marcos government with inciting rebellion and may be accused of murder as well. His defenders argue that the charges are trumped up: Gore's only crime was organizing community-action groups among the poor. Gore admits, "I cannot help fearing for my life."

In Nicaragua, Sister Rachel Pinal, 48, walks for hours through the precipitous mountains of Nueva Segovia to help the

impoverished campesinos. She spends her nights sleeping alongside many dogs, chickens and pigs on the hard-packed clay floors of the shacks of peasants who take her in. Despite such hardships, says Sister Rachel, "we get involved in so many wonderful things that sometimes I cry myself to sleep from joy."

In a multitude of ways, these missionaries are all obeying the injunction of Jesus Christ: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28: 19). Their numbers include Roman Catholic priests in the Himalayas who wear the maroon robes of Buddhist monks. There are born-again Protestant bush pilots coming in on a wing and a prayer to land on narrow runways in the Amazonian and Indonesian jungles. They are seeking to spread the good news of Christ in a vast variety of situations: amid revolution and civil war in Central America; in parched, famine-haunted lands in Africa; in the forests of Southeast Asia, where the demons worshiped by animistic tribes are almost a palpable presence.

In all, there are an estimated 220,000 Christian missionaries at work in the world today: 138,000 Catholics and 82,000 Protestants, including more than 6,000 Catholics and 32,000 Protestants from the U.S. The new missionary typically works with the downtrodden and despised of societies in the far stretches of Af-

rica or Latin America or in the vast highlands of Southeast Asia.

To commemorate the birth of Jesus, 250 Lisu tribesmen in Thailand's mountainous Chiang Rai province will assemble this week for three days of prayer and movies about Christ. In Sarawak, a Malaysian province on the island of Borneo, Dyak tribesmen one generation removed from head-hunting will gather in longhouses along the turbid Rajang River for caroling. Similar scenes will take place in impoverished villages in Guatemala, Brazil, Botswana and India. In many cases, the celebrations will be organized and guided by Western missionaries. Says Timothy Wyma, a Protestant who supervises nine New Tribes Mission outposts in the jungles of Bolivia: "To me, this is the only job in the world that is big enough. If you are looking for something that needs all you have, this is it."

The 19th century missionaries and their immediate successors have been attacked by historians and many Third World leaders for having served as spiritual agents of the colonizing powers, blithely destroying cultures as they sought to impose Western values as well as Christian doctrines on their converts. In a somewhat more muted form, that criticism is still heard today. Argentine Theologian José Miguez-Bonino, a member of the six-person presidency of the World Council of Churches, says, "The missionary enterprise of the past 150 years is interwoven with the expansion of economic, political and cultural influence of the Anglo-Saxon world, whether Catholic or Protestant. We from the Third World call this neocolonialism or imperialism."

Others wonder how long missionaries from the West will still be needed as thriving local churches in the Third World develop strong leadership. By the year 2000, demographers predict, Asia, Africa and Latin America will have three-fifths of the world's Christians, compared with 47% today. Protestant churches in the Third World now send out 15,000 missionaries of their own, including some to Europe and the U.S.

Along with the old disputes about spiritual imperialism or the propriety of seeking converts from other faiths, there is a continuing sharp debate over whether missionaries should be mainly savers of souls or workers trying to improve the daily lives of people. Among Protestants, there has been a shift toward greater involvement with the basic economic and social problems of the people the missionaries are trying to reach. The change is exemplified by the efforts of the Rev. Dan Schellenberg, who is trying to improve the farming techniques of the same Kenya tribes that his father evangelized. Schellenberg, who is with the biggest U.S. mission agency, the Southern Baptist Convention, says, "My father wouldn't approve of what I'm doing," and calls his father's methods of seeking converts "buttonholing for Jesus." Yet the younger Schellenberg remains an evangelist. When a hot day's work is done, he chats with farmer friends about the threat of evil spirits and the opportunity of gaining freedom through Jesus Christ.

The longstanding arguments about social action are now hitting Catholics full force, especially in Latin America. The new Catholic emphasis on service to the poor has its roots in the Second Vatican Council. The Rev. Simon Smith, head of the Jesuit missions sent from the U.S., argues that the sharing of Christian beliefs "has taken second place to being of service to human beings."

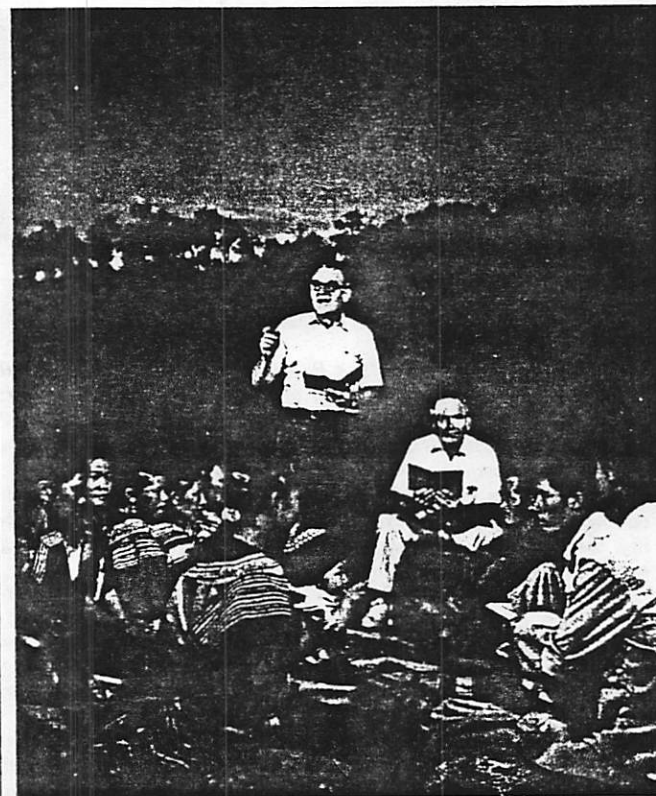
For an increasing number of Catholic missionaries, identification with the cause of the poor means advocacy of radical changes in political and economic systems—even if those changes are being spearheaded by Marxist revolutionary movements. Advocates of this so-called liberation theology are most visible in Nicaragua, where five priests, contrary to the Pope's directive against the clergy holding political office, are members of the Marxist-led Sandinista government.

The belief that missionaries should care as much about helping people improve their lives as about converting them to Christianity originated with the "mainline" Protestant denominations that constitute the National Council of Churches (N.C.C.). But this liberal Protestant view is a waning influence around the world. Reason: mainline churches believe that indigenous workers should be doing most of the spiritual tasks once performed by missionaries. Thus churches that belong to the N.C.C. now



BOTSWANA: THE EWERTS

"We can't bribe people into accepting the credibility of the church."



THAILAND: THE MORSES

"We wanted to show what Christians working together could achieve."

Religion

support only 2,813 career missionaries abroad, compared with 9,844 in 1953.

By contrast, Fundamentalists and Evangelicals—many of whom do belong to mainline churches—are supporting a missionary movement that since 1953 has tripled its number of workers abroad to more than 30,000. The Christian and Missionary Alliance, an evangelical denomination with 200,000 members, supports 40% more workers than does the United Methodist Church, which has 9.5 million adherents. The overseas staffs of conservative churches care as deeply as others about improving the lives of the people they work among, but their primary goal is to turn them into born-again Christians. The most important change in Protestant missionary strategy in the past ten years has been to identify and seek to contact some 16,000 tribes and social groups around the world that have been beyond the reach of Christianity.

Alan Foster, 35, and his wife Vickie, 29, live with their three children in Campamento Chimora, a frontier settlement hacked out of Bolivia's hellish rain forest. Foster, whose father was an evangelist, was sent by the New Tribes Mission to work with the Yuqui Indians. He is about to join a "contact team" that hopes to find three elusive Yuqui groups deep in the jungle. Such teams are often attacked by the tribesmen they are trying to reach. But for all the dangers of their task, the Fosters have developed a close rapport with Indians at the station. Says Vickie Foster: "They get so close to us, they become like family."

The burgeoning evangelical groups often post missionaries to foreign countries without waiting to be invited, while N.C.C. missionary boards stress close collaboration with Third World churches. Nonetheless, the conservatives are becoming far more sophisticated in anthropology and far more respectful of the peoples and cultures of other nations than they used to be. In Bolivia, evangelical missionaries even steeled themselves not to object to the custom of the Ayore tribesmen of killing their firstborn and burying old people alive.

All missionaries, liberal or conservative, Catholic or Protestant, agree that one key goal is to develop self-sufficient indigenous churches, if only because they never know when political conditions will force foreign-born clerics to leave forever. Says the Rev. Joseph Kelly, an American missionary with the Holy Ghost Fathers who has worked in Tanzania and Kenya for 31 years: "Unlike people in the business world, who want to make themselves indispensable, the task of the missionary is to make himself unnecessary."

In contrast to their predecessors, the new missionaries agree that as much as possible, the preaching of the Gospel should be shorn of Western cultural trappings and adapted to the civilization of the people to whom it is offered. Instead of Christianizing Africa, so the policy runs, missionaries should help to Africanize Christianity.

The current buzz word used by Catholics for the process of adapting the Christian message to local traditions is "inculturation." The idea is not new. Four centuries ago, Father Matteo Ricci, a Jesuit missionary in China, tried to incorporate the Confucian reverence for ancestors into Catholic ritual. The Vatican quashed the experiment. Says one Catholic official in Rome who

works with missionaries: "Inculturation is a difficult thing and sometimes I would say a dangerous thing. Leaving your own culture and adopting that of the people among whom you work may lead you to go too far, toward animism perhaps." At the moment, the first black archbishop in Zambia, Emmanuel Milingo, is in Rome for a period of "reflection" because he carried on a ministry of exorcism and faith healing, complete with such tribal accoutrements as fly whisks and animal skins.

The new sensitivity toward local cultures has led even conservative Protestants to treat tribal religion with respect. Missionaries try to banish belief in, and fear of, evil spirits; yet they also plumb the animist religions for concepts of eternal life or of a remote "high god" or primordial creator that might be used to inspire belief in the one God of the Bible. After all, the missionaries point out, Christmas was originally a pagan rite that ancient preachers turned to good advantage.

Indeed, there are missionaries who believe that conversion is fundamentally irrelevant to their true task. Says Father Walbert Buhlmann, the Rome-based mission secretary of the Order of Friars Minor Capuchin: "In the past, we had the so-called motive of saving souls. We were convinced that if not baptized, people in the masses would go to hell. Now, thanks be to God, we believe that all people and all religions are already living in the grace and love of God and will be saved by God's mercy."

The Christian churches may differ in doctrine and in their basic convictions about what mission work is all about, but one factor tends to unite liberals and conservatives, Protestants and Catholics: they are all reaching out to the poor. By and large, the unevangelized populations of the world are those stricken by poverty and threatened by rapid change in their societies.

All these conflicting patterns and tensions converge in Latin America, which has more U.S. missionaries than any other part of the world: some 9,250 Protestants and 2,180 Catholics. With a few notable exceptions, Catholic missionaries in the 17th and 18th centuries preached subservience to Spanish and Portuguese rule, while promis-

ing the natives a better life in the hereafter. Protestant missionaries, who began arriving in force in the 19th century, condemned the rich Catholic landowners and military elites, and were severely persecuted. As recently as the decade ending in 1958, there were 126 Protestants killed, 279 schools closed and 60 churches destroyed in Colombia alone. After Pope John XXIII took office in 1958, attacks on Latin America's Protestants abated.

Today, by contrast, Catholic missionaries have strongly aligned themselves with the poor, encouraging them to fight for social justice. Pope John Paul II has supported his priests in this cause, as long as they do not become directly engaged in politics. Some Protestant missionaries share the radical views of the Catholic activists. But a majority of the evangelical and fundamentalist missionaries either sympathize with rightist regimes or accept the status quo and insist that spiritual conversion, not political action, is the true work of the Lord.

Because they defied the authorities, two French Catholic missionaries languished last week in federal police headquarters in Brasilia, the capital of Brazil, while they appealed eight- and



GUATEMALA: THE ELLIOTTS

"I prayed as never before. My family's lives were at stake."

ten-year sentences for alleged "incitement to kill." Father Aristides Camio, 41, and Father François Guriou, 40, got into trouble in the jungles of the Amazon basin by advising the impoverished natives that, under the law, they had a claim on land in a rain forest. When the natives hacked out villages, clearing the tangle of trees with machetes, they were attacked by gun squads hired by absentee owners of the forests. According to the priests, 47 people died in the skirmishes.

On Aug. 13, 1981, the squatters, as the government calls them, killed one of the gunmen and wounded four federal agents. Though the two priests were not involved, police burst into their rectory and arrested them on the charge that their sermons the previous Sunday had stirred up the rebellion. The two fathers deny the accusations; their defense lawyers say that police used torture to persuade nine peasants to testify against the two men. The priests are warmly remembered back in the jungle. Says Josias de Silva, 37, the head of one of 36 families guarding their makeshift village in the rain forest: "Father Aristides showed us the church is on the side of the poor."

In Guatemala, the Catholic hierarchy remains staunchly conservative. Mario Cardinal Casariego, the Archbishop of Guatemala City, says he knows of no murdered clergy in his country (there have been at least ten, according to most accounts). Says the Cardinal: "If you mix in politics, you get what you deserve." Although Guatemala is desperately short of priests, Casariego wants troublesome missionaries to leave. The Cardinal is equally perturbed by the growth of Protestant churches, which now claim 21% of the population, including the head of the government, General Efraín Ríos Montt. The general, whose brother is a Catholic bishop, is a born-again Christian who found his new faith in 1978 at a tent church run by Pentecostals from California. Some of the evangelists were converts from the drug culture.

When Ray Elliott, 50, and his wife Helen, 56, came to Guatemala in 1953, Protestants were a scorned and despised minority. After arriving in the remote village of Nebaj, nestled in a steep valley 165 miles northwest of Guatemala City, the Elliotts learned that a priest was warning the people that Protestants were devils and kidnapers who should be refused all goods and supplies. To this day, Helen Elliott has trouble acknowledging Catholics as fellow Christians.

The young couple, who had been high-school sweethearts in Independence, Kans., settled with their three children into a two-room dirt-floor sharecropper's cabin. The Elliotts had been sent to Guatemala by the Wycliffe Bible Translators of Huntington Beach, Calif., who dispatch teams around the world to create the first written form of languages or dialects that exist only in a spoken form. Experts then translate the New Testament into the language—in the Elliotts' case, a difficult Indian tongue called Ixil.

The Elliotts faced stony opposition for two years. Then, one day, there was an explosion in a storehouse for firecrackers, which the Ixil tribesmen used to get the attention of gods to whom they offered sacrifices. Two boys were horribly burned. By the time Helen arrived on the scene, neighbors had already plastered the burns with a mixture of lime, wood ash and motor oil.

Helen, who had had no medical training, gave the boys morphine and antibiotic injections, picked off the goo and seared

flesh, wrapped the victims in sheets sterilized in a pressure cooker, and forced them to drink eggnog through straws (all the water was contaminated). When Helen returned after putting her own children to bed, she discovered that a witch doctor had ripped off the bandages and was rubbing hot pepper on the wounds, invoking Christian saints and Mayan deities, all the while drinking rum. In a scene reminiscent of Elijah confronting the prophets of Baal, Helen told the parents that they must choose between her treatment and the witch doctor's.

The parents chose Helen. As the boys hovered near death, she prayed as never before. "This was a chance for people to experience the living Gospel," she recalls. But, she adds, "my family's lives were at stake." The boys survived and Helen was so besieged by the sick that she soon became the village's practical nurse, delivering hundreds of babies, suturing hundreds of wounds. The Ixils began to accept the Elliotts as prophets of a loving god.

The crisis also produced a breakthrough in Ray's torturous translation struggle. An Indian woman, marveling at Helen's treatment of the boys, used a word they had never heard: *shum*, which means, giving without receiving anything in return. This was the word Ray needed to translate "love" into Ixil.



BOLIVIA: THE FOSTERS

"They get so close to us, they become like family."

The Elliotts suffered through typhoid fever, malaria and amoebic dysentery. But their most wrenching experience was the loss last year of their home. Left-wing guerrilla activity around Nebaj got so heavy, says Ray, that "our presence was endangering our friends." Along with all Catholic missionaries, they had to pull out of the war zone. Operating from a house trailer in Guatemala City, the Elliotts now work to get shipments of roofing, food, blankets, clean water and medical supplies for their village.

Every few days the Elliotts board a cargo flight to Nebaj, where 10,000 refugees, many burned out of their homes, huddle in camps. The planes land, amid bursts of guerrilla fire, and are immediately surrounded by the Elliotts' Ixil friends. Helen's eyes mist over. "Nebaj is the home of our children," she says. "Now most of the people understand the word of God because of Ray's work."

Latin America has been nominally Catholic for centuries, and most of its nations won their inde-

pendence in the 19th century. Both Christianity and statehood, however, are relatively new to black Africa. Protestant and Catholic mission schools were responsible for training many leaders of the 38 new nations on the continent that have gained their independence since 1956.

For missionaries in what is now Zimbabwe, the civil war that ended in 1979 brought death and harassment from both sides. Father Mark Hackett, 46, a Catholic priest from Britain, recalls that black guerrillas opposed the missions as relics of the colonial past. On the other hand, government troops threatened to kill Hackett for harboring rebels. The suspicions were correct. Black guerrillas appeared almost nightly at Hackett's mission hospital in Makumbi, and, he says, "we never turned anyone away who needed help." One guerrilla was saved when hospital workers disguised him as a pregnant woman. Unlike many of their Latin American colleagues, foreign missionaries in Africa today generally steer clear of politics. The reason: even vague criticism of sensitive black regimes can result in deportation within 24 hours.

Religion

Most missionaries are also careful to avoid offending the sensibilities of the increasingly successful black churches that are independent of Western denominations and missions. The largest of these is the Kimbanguist church in Zaïre, which has 3.5 million members. There are more than 6,700 independent denominations in Africa with a total membership of 30 million. Some are highly orthodox in doctrine, while others incorporate tribal rites in their services and even accept polygamists in church offices. These growing black churches are sending out missionaries of their own. Among them is Ken Okeke, a Nigerian Anglican who works with his countrymen studying in England. Okeke is dismayed by what he finds in the nation that first evangelized his homeland: "This country has become more and more apostate."

For all the vigor of the black churches, there is still a role in Africa for traditional missionaries with skills and tact. One is Alfred Merriweather, 63, a physician sent in 1944 by the United Free Church of Scotland to run the Livingstone Mission at Molepolole, Botswana; the center is named for David Livingstone, the famed 19th century Scottish missionary and explorer. Merriweather has seen massive changes over four decades. "On reflection, we made many mistakes. When I joined the mission service, my immediate senior banned traditional tribal dancing as being heathen. Today no one would dream of denying the local people their traditions. We do, however, have to battle even now, as in the past, against witch doctors and so-called healers who kill as often as they cure."

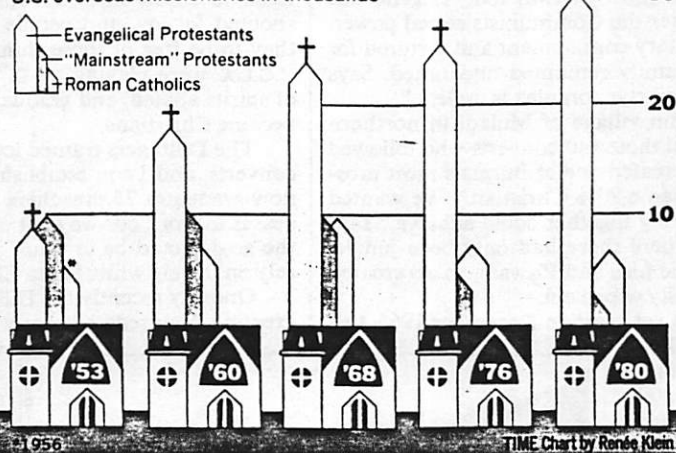
At the lonely bush hospital, Merriweather had to contend with ailments brought from the outside world, such as tuberculosis and syphilis, as well as malnutrition, leprosy, maulings by lions or a scalp fungus caused by a lack of washing. In the cruel Kalahari Desert, explains the doctor, "water, if you find it, is for drinking, not washing." As an ordained clergyman, Merriweather also performed funeral services for patients who died.

The Molepolole hospital is now operated by the Botswana government, and Merriweather has become the senior medical officer at Princess Marina Hospital in the country's capital, Gaborone. He was crippled in a 1971 auto crash that killed his first wife and almost ended his medical career. Walking with a limp and in some pain, he still makes his hospital rounds. A Commander of the British Empire, the unassuming doctor was elected the first speaker of the National Assembly when Botswana won its independence in 1966, a rare honor for a white.

In addition to his demanding hospital schedule, Merriweather continues to conduct weekly services in the hinterlands. His second wife Mary does the packing and often drives their Land Rover. One recent Sunday in the village of Kumkwane, members

SPREADING THE WORD

U.S. overseas missionaries in thousands



grateful mother could think of no better gift for us than the baby. It may seem unconventional in Western terms, but believe me, this is a long way from the West. So we accepted Mpho as a gift from God, and that is what she has been to us ever since.

"I came to Botswana to heal and to teach and to give," says Merriweather, who has no plans to retire. "I find that I also learn and receive. I learn patience and I see how to endure and receive affection and trust. In those needy eyes of the Bakwena, I see the eyes of Christ, and I know that as I serve them I serve him who said, 'Inasmuch as you have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, you have done it unto me.'"

In contrast to black Africa, where Christianity may well become the majority religion by the year 2000, post-colonial Asia is an area where Christians constitute a mere 4.4% of the population. Although most Muslim and Communist lands forbid proselytizing, missionaries have been able to seize surprising opportunities in Asia, particularly among remote adherents of tribal religions.

Consider the extraordinary odyssey of one Oklahoma family: J. Russell Morse, his sons Eugene and Robert, and the eight of their twelve children who are now third-generation missionaries. They are sponsored by the Christian Churches, a loose confederation of conservative Protestant congregations. The Morses are among the leading missionaries in Asia. Because of their efforts, 120,000 Asian adults are Christians.

J. Russell Morse went to Tibet in 1921. He was nearly killed by feuding warlords, and moved into a mountainous area of China near the Burmese border. Ordered by the U.S. consul to leave the region during an outbreak of civil war in 1927, the family made a 70-day trek through snowcapped mountains and malarial forests into Burma. The Morses eventually returned to work again in Yunnan, a remote region of China where cannibals roamed, Tibetan bandits burned villages, and the chief trade with the outside world was carried on by opium dealers. The nearest hospital was four weeks away by foot.

Between 1927 and 1937, Morse established some 30 churches and baptized 2,000

A Sheep Is a Sheep

Among the baffling problems facing missionaries today is how to convey scriptural concepts in the tongues of Stone Age tribes. The experts who were trying to translate the Bible for the Dani tribe in Indonesia were thrown by the verse "All we like sheep have gone astray" (Isaiah 53: 6). Reason: most of the Dani had never seen a sheep. "So," says Linguist David Scoville, "we thought of using a pig as a 'cultural equivalent.'" But then the missionaries had to contend with the succeeding verse, believed by Christians to foreshadow the Crucifixion, describing a lamb that is quietly "led to the slaughter." The translators decided they could not substitute pig for lamb in that context because pigs make a squealing commotion before they are killed. What to do? Happily, the mission was beginning to introduce sheep for farming. The linguists promoted the program so that all of the villagers could learn about the animals' passive personality. Only then could the translators call a sheep a sheep.

converts. Evacuated to Burma again during World War II, Morse advised the Allies to use a different and safer air route to fly the "Hump" over the Himalayas to Kunming. Meanwhile, young Robert organized tribes to assist airmen who crashed. The family returned to China for a third postwar tour; Eugene was imprisoned briefly in 1949, after the Communists seized power, and his father was held in solitary confinement and tortured for more than 15 months. The family remained undaunted. Says Robert: "A missionary with a martyr complex is useless."

Starting over in the Kachin village of Muladi in northern Burma, the Morses and several thousand converts who followed them out of China gradually created one of Burma's most prosperous areas and one that became 90% Christian. "We wanted to show what Christians working together could achieve," says Eugene Morse. In a valley where there had only been jungle, 35,000 members of the nomadic Lisu and Rawang tribes created 30 villages. Malaria was virtually wiped out.

The Morses were uprooted yet again in December 1965, this time by soldiers of Socialist Dictator Ne Win. The night the order came, 600 Lisu packed the thatched-roofed church to hear the family patriarch, then 67, read from *Matthew 10: 23*: "When they persecute you in one town, flee for the next; for truly, I say to you, you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel before the son of man comes."

After leaving their homes, the Morses and thousands of Kachin refugees created yet another Christian utopia in an uninhabited valley near Burma's border with India. In 1972, the missionaries were ordered out of Burma for good. They settled in the city of Chiang Mai in northern Thailand for the eighth phase of the family's career. Robert, 59, is a teacher and linguist, and Eugene, 61, organizes evangelists to reach the 13,000 of the brightly costumed Lisu people within Thailand. Eight of the brothers' twelve children are missionaries in Thailand; the other four are studying in the U.S. Next month, J. Russell Morse plans to leave Oklahoma and come back to help the clan. He is 84.

Leon Dillinger has had similar success in another obscure corner of Asia: the interior of Irian Jaya (formerly Dutch New Guinea and now part of Indonesia). Dillinger, 51, and wife Lorraine, 48, work among Dani tribesmen cut off from the outside world by crocodile-infested, malarial lowlands and mountain ranges that soar to 13,000 ft. It is against Indonesian law to convert any person who already has a religion, and 88% of the country is Muslim. But the government does allow Christian missionary work, Minister for Religious Affairs Haji Alamjah Ratuprawiranegara acknowledged to TIME, "as long as it is only aimed at the animists." When Dillinger arrived 24 years ago, he remembers, "every aspect of the Dani world had spirits: the mountains, the gardens, the trees. The people lived in constant fear and dread." The oppressive atmosphere also bred wars between tribes. "That was the hardest part for me," says Lorraine, "watching them kill each other before we could teach them the Gospel."

Then the Dillingers went to work to convert tribesmen who relied on charms and fetishes to fight the evil spirits. Lorraine, a nurse, used penicillin to cure yaws and iodine to treat goiters. The medical treatment and the Dillingers' radio seemed miracles to members of the Stone Age tribe: they thought the disembodied voices belonged to their ancestors.

In 1960, when the couple lived in a grass hut in the village of Kelila, the tribal chief surprised them one day by coming to say, "As long as we have our fetishes, we are not ready to hear God." About 5,000 Danis brought charms and spirit paraphernalia to throw onto a bonfire. Recalls Dillinger: "The men shouted for joy, and people ran up and down, so happy were they to be free of those things. It couldn't have been noisier if U.C.L.A. were playing U.S.C." Tribal bloodshed ceased, the fear of spirits abated, and gradually more than 100,000 of the Danis became Christians.

The Dillingers trained local preachers from the first wave of converts, and Leon established the Dani Bible Institute, which now graduates 75 preachers a year. Says he: "Our greatest success is to work our way out of a job. In all developing countries, the goal should be to teach people to be self-reliant and not to rely on the big white Santa Claus."

One day recently the Dillingers stood in a mountain pasture greeting hundreds of nearly naked black Dani tribesmen and

women who had gathered for a traditional pig feast. The two missionaries seemed as much at ease as they would be at a church potluck supper in Leon's home town of Souderton, Pa. Leon chatted with the last man in the village to accept Christianity: the son of the sorcerer. Lorraine sampled food that a Dani woman had just pulled from the braising pit hollowed out of the ground for the occasion.



INDONESIA: THE DILLINGERS

"Our greatest success is to work ourselves out of a job."

The Dillingers, who represent the Unevangelized Fields Mission, a conservative Protestant agency, have helped the Danis make Christianity their own by blending it with local customs and practices. At worship, Danis use sweet potatoes and raspberry juice instead of bread and wine for Communion, and sing hymns they have written themselves. The missionaries even allow male converts who have more than one wife to retain their spouses. The Dillingers reason that to banish all but the first wife would disrupt the tribal culture and cause prostitution. Unmarried converts, however, may take only one wife after joining the church.

Each year brings new delights and surprises for the Dillingers. Last December, it was the Christmas pageant in costume, staged by the Danis. As the drama proceeded,

it became clear that the tribespeople were portraying not the Nativity in Bethlehem but Christ's Crucifixion, complete with catnip for blood. When it was over, a Dani chief explained, "Why not? Jesus was born to die for us on the Cross, so it's all the same thing." The Dillingers understood.

It is difficult not to admire the zeal of the Dillingers and thousands of other missionaries who have dedicated their lives to the selfless yet ultimately self-fulfilling task of spreading Christ's word throughout the world. Nonetheless, despite their awareness of the religious arrogance of older missionaries, and their sensitivity to the customs and rituals of the peoples they serve, questions remain as to whether the spiritual good they do is not balanced, in part, by social and cultural harm.

In the Irian Jaya village of Mulia, for example, schools set up by the missionaries threaten a complex family structure that developed over the course of centuries. The children no longer can help their mothers work in the gardens and the rise in monogamy adds to the wives' labor. As a result, some overburdened women are dying young. The introduction of Western agricul-

Religion

tural techniques has also undermined the self-esteem of the Danis: the missionaries can raise superior crops and 300-lb. pigs, five times as large as those the tribes were producing. Says Bob Lehnhart, an official of the Mission Aviation Fellowship, which flies supplies into the Indonesian jungles: "Suddenly the people are feeling that they must throw out everything from the past and learn everything new." In rebuttal, missionaries argue that evolution toward modern ways is inevitable and that they can buffer the struggles more humanely for the tribes than would land and mineral developers.

Try as they might to blend with the local population and to adapt the Christian message to their ways, the visitors inevitably bring Western values with them. For instance, missionaries in Asia expect newly baptized Christians to take personal blame for their actions; that is not an easy lesson for people raised in neo-Confucian societies that emphasize group responsibility. New Christians, whose cultures have taught them to mask emotions or express them indirectly, have difficulty accepting the evangelical emphasis on a public affirmation of faith.

The new ways and the old often mix badly. The faith of some recently established congregations in rural Thailand tends to waver if prayers go unanswered. At the Ban Ti Christian Church north of Lamphun, a large blackboard hangs on the wall behind the pulpit. Prayers for rain, a speedy harvest and painless cures for various maladies are recorded every Sunday, then checked off the following week against the results.

This kind of pragmatic approach to Christianity does not surprise Rubem Alvez, one of Brazil's leading liberal Protestant thinkers. He argues that missionaries from the West, and especially from the U.S., bring with them an implicit promise: "Be converted to Protestantism, and you will become like the affluent nations of the world."

Among non-Christians, the most serious criticism of missionaries is that, just as in the past, they are changing religious ways of life for whole societies. Says Saeng Changarm, a professor at Chiang Mai University in Thailand, a Buddhist and a respected analyst of his society: "Even though we are very much Westernized nowadays, our Buddhist culture keeps us uniquely Thai. When a Thai becomes Christian, the country loses a unit of its spiritual power. If the entire country became Christian, it would no longer be Thailand."

In their defense, conservative Protestants acknowledge they are trying to win converts, but say they are simply offering a choice, and point out that those who change their religions do so freely and happily. The Morises, for example, have never put pressure to convert on students who stay at their hostel in Chiang Mai. "By the time they leave," says young Bob Morse, "they know what the Bible says and can make their own decision."

Sweeping the debate over conversions aside, the Rev. Willie Cilliers, secretary for missions of the black Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa, argues that the true role of the missionary is simply to reach out to the poor, in imitation of Jesus. Says he: "We have a message to proclaim: that from a Christian perspective it is the weak in society who have the first priority. That is what the Christian message is about—reaching out to the weak."

It is 4:30 a.m. in Cairo when Sister Emmanuelle, 74, awakens in her hut with its dirt floor and gaping hole in the roof. After washing in a bucket, she sets out on a two-mile walk to attend Mass at the nearest church. She is clad in a white smock and a necklace with a silver cross. Her route takes her through mounds of fetid garbage, rotting produce and broken glass. The tiny figure wards off snarling dogs in the darkness with a dart of light from a battered flashlight.

The Belgian-born nun, whose very name bespeaks Christmas, is the only missionary among the 10,000 garbage pickers of the Egyptian capital. They are untouchables who live in what amounts to perpetual serfdom, bequeathing their trade and squalor to succeeding generations. The garbage pickers stay alive by sorting through the refuse that is hauled out from the city in creaking donkey carts. The ragged men and women save the bottles and tin cans to be sold, and feed the slop to the pigs who live with them. Infant mortality in the community is an appalling 40%.

At 9 o'clock Sister Emmanuelle welcomes 40 youngsters who attend school at her hut. She is distressed that ten students are absent; undoubtedly they are out working with their parents in the garbage heap. She will visit them later that day with lessons. In this environment of waste and disease, where she has worked for ten years, Sister Emmanuelle endlessly preaches the need for cleanliness, and the children at school are neatly dressed. As the lesson goes on, she speaks to the children in Arabic in a voice that almost sings. Each faltering step toward literacy is rewarded with a smile from the nun and a hearty shout of "Bravo!" or a piece of candy.

Then Sister Emmanuelle turns to Bible stories and prayers with students who are Coptic Christians; the Muslim ones depart. "Today we don't talk about conversion any more," she explains. "We talk about being friends. My job is to prove that God is love, to bring courage to these people."

Waving aside the flies that fill the air in enormous clouds, Sister Emmanuelle spends hours visiting her flock, carrying a ledger in which she has meticulously written down the names and needs of 3,000 families. But her gentleness turns to

steel when she browbeats bureaucrats or bankers to help the garbage pickers. She envisions motorized vehicles to replace the dilapidated donkey carts. She wants to replace pickers' filthy garments with clean uniforms and to pen the pigs instead of allowing them to roam in and out of homes. Says she: "It will cost money, but it won't be expensive. I want to prove it's possible to be a clean and dignified garbage collector, and slowly, slowly, we will do it. With God, everything is possible."

In her life and actions among the garbage pickers, the nun epitomizes the best in today's new missionary. "I'm not interested in going to those convents where old nuns spend their last days," she reflects. "I want to remain here doing what I'm doing until the day I die. I wouldn't want to be anywhere else because here I feel I am giving the life of Jesus Christ to the children." The final gift to mankind of Sister Emmanuelle, and thousands of missionaries like her, is themselves.

—By Richard N. Ostling.
Reported by Dean Brells/Middle East and South Asia, Sandra Burton and David DeVoss/Asia, Peter Hawthorne and Alistair Matheson/Africa and James Wilde/Latin America



EGYPT: SISTER EMMANUELLE

"My job is to bring courage to these poor people."

RELIGIOUS PLURALISM TODAY



presented as a challenge

by a Presbyterian missiologist

Charles W. Forman



the Church is divided over possible responses

by an ecumenical missiologist

Lesslie Newbigin

Joseph Bustillos
MT 533: Theology of Religious Encounter
1/4/85

challenge

Essay Review: Religious Pluralism and the Mission of the Church,
by Charles W. Forman.

Being somewhat of a theological Neanderthal I do not detect any obvious theological presuppositions on the part of Charles Forman beyond what is assumed to be an Orthodox Presbyterian doctrinal stance. ✓

Dr. Forman begins his essay by reviewing the history of Pluralism and its recent acceptance on the part of Christian scholars. The essay is rather effective in building a scenario where Pluralism is being universally accepted on the part of Christianity (mainly because of Christianity's glaring errors in inter-religious relationships in the past). All heaven and earth abound in rejoicing and merriment. Mankind is now living as one people . . . ✓

Then the second act of the play opens and the protagonist asks, "Just because X was so terrible in the past should we accept Y? Does Y have any inherent faults?" The hushed audience holds its breath as the pretty pictures are brought down and closely examined. And sure enough, moths have been silently making a feast out of our pretty pictures. This is most interesting considering S.J. Samartha's glowing essay on the glories of Pluralism. Forman points out that Pluralism tends to create an atmosphere of epidemic religious relativism. I loved his quote of Gibbon when contrasting our present relativism with that of First Century Rome: ✓

The various modes of worship, which prevailed in the Roman world were all considered by the people as equally true; by the philosopher, as equally false; and by the magistrate, as equally useful. ✓

This relativism, Forman seems to believe, is a unstable condition that will eventually lead to either isolationism (on the part of the minority religion) or tyranny (because stability is needed to rule a people). Associated with this religious relativism is the appearance of a Civil Religion. This term refers to a people's implied beliefs that make up the unconscious backbone of their religious thinking. ✓

Forman's offers a pragmatic evaluation of the situation. He writes that we must take advantage of the opportunities offered by our present Pluralistic situation³, as we should under any given situation. At the same time, he feels that the Church must be aware of the dangers of buckling under the pressures of isolationism and relativism.

Considering the points of view set forth by Samartha and Forman I can understand their fears and excitement. I can see the need to receive and treat each individual with respect and love and openness. I appreciate the newness of throwing off the old shackles of our traditional religious self-identity. But

Forman's call for caution also finds a place in my heart. Distinction and discernment are not necessarily bedfellows with prejudice and hatred. This is the fine line that all Christians must walk. As the old saying goes: "Love the sinner, hate the sin." This the call of Agape, this is the call of Christ. /

FOOTNOTES

¹I realize that's a horrible over-generalization but the contrast between Forman's caution and Samartha's enthusiasm seemed to dictate this response from me. Later in the essay Samartha is footnoted as being among the Christian scholars caught up in this "relativizing trend." (p 253, footnote 23). ✓✓

²E Gibbon. The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire. 1932, 25-26.

³Forman sees the benefits of our Pluralistic society as being our chance at having open freedom of choice and a more metropolitan/world consciousness.

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Charles W. Forman
**Religious Pluralism
and the Mission of the Church**

FIDES PRO MUNDI VITA (Missionstheologie heute)

In Verbindung mit

Hans-Jurgen Becken und Bernward H. Willeke, OFM
herausgegeben von Theo Sundermeier

HANS-WERNER GENSICHEN zum 65. GEBURTSTAG

The rapid spread of religious pluralism is one of the most noticeable signs of our times. Of course, when the world is considered as a whole, there has always been religious pluralism, but a pluralism of religions in every part of the world is the thing which is new and the thing which will concern us here. We are faced with what may be called a desegregation of religions. No religion is confined to a particular continent or country any more. What were once called the "religions of the East" are vibrantly alive in the West. Even a so-called national religion like Japanese Shinto is spreading to other lands and among non-Japanese people. Hans-Werner Gensichen in his overarching study of the theology of missions makes it clear that this is a fact which needs to be recognized by Christian missions and needs greater thought from missiologists¹.

It is strange that in the past students of mission have not paid attention to the phenomenon of religious pluralism since missions were creating the phenomenon wherever they went. Pluralism did not spread to the West in past generations, but it was part of the missionary impact on the East. As a result of mission work Christianity began to appear along side the traditional religion of each land and created a pluralist situation where there had previously been none or increased pluralism where it already existed. Only in some of the South Pacific islands can it be said that the result of Christian missions was other than pluralism, that a unified traditional faith was replaced by a unified Christendom. Yet elsewhere the pluralism which accompanied missions was not clearly recognized nor its implications explored. Foreign mission theory in America, for example, paid no attention to what happens in a pluralist situation and how it can affect our understanding of religion, except perhaps for some indirect reflections during a brief and atypical period in the 1920s². The reason for the indifference is doubtless that pluralism was thought of as only a transitional phase. There would be a temporary pluralism in various lands as a stage in the process of conversion of entire peoples, but that stage did not in itself merit attention.

Today, however, it is becoming apparent that what was thought of as a temporary stage is in fact the long-term prospect and that the pluralism which Christians introduced into the East and the South is being introduced by other religions to the West and the North. As a result Christian scholars are at last having to pay attention to the situation and examine what Christian attitudes toward it should be.

The stance taken by Christian scholars is one which is decidedly favorable to pluralism. Edward Jurji has edited a book, *Religious Pluralism and World Community*³, in which the writers stress the values of pluralism and offer the support which their various religions can bring to it. Most of the contributors are not Christians, but those who support the pluralizing trend and press for the development of a more ecumenical spirit which will help the religions live peacefully together in the various societies⁴. Wilfred Cantwell Smith in his work, *The Faith of Other Men*⁵ reminds us that the new world coming into being is a pluralistic world and that we must set our faces deliberately and joyously in that direction or we will be unable to deal creatively with it⁶. Kenneth Cragg has provided a chapter on "A Theology of Religious Pluralism" in his *Christianity in World Perspective*⁷, where he makes the basic point that we must recognize the pluralistic reality before us, whatever our sense of the providential purpose in it may be, and urges us to a hospitality toward other religions which clearly implies a positive stance with regard to this reality⁸.

These authors are thinking primarily of pluralism in the world as a whole rather than pluralism within each society. W.A. Visser 't Hooft, however, in his essay, "Pluralismus — Versuchung oder Chance", clearly has in mind the situation within pluralistic societies. He recognizes that this situation creates temptations to relativism and syncretism in religion or, alternatively, to isolationism, but he believes that Christians should affirm pluralism as a good situation for the church to live in, despite its temptations. It is good not only when the church is weak but also when the church is strong and might be able to dominate the society. He affirms this because pluralism makes evident the real nature of the church's life which, in imitation of her master, is to be carried on in humility and not with forceful domination⁹.

Two scholars have given more extensive consideration to the grounds for favoring pluralism. Karl Rahner's consideration begins on a different note with the statement that from the Christian point of view pluralism is a fact which, in part at least, should not exist¹⁰. But he goes on to remind us that according to the Gospel, opposition to Christ will endure till the end of time and that in this day of world unity such opposition cannot be limited to certain areas but must be found everywhere in a truly pluralistic way¹¹. All this, however, is subordinate to his main effort which is to show that there is a legitimate place for the variety of religions — what he calls lawful religions — during this epoch and a salvific function which they can perform in their pluralistic presence¹².

A. Th. van Leeuwen is another author who has tried to build a foundation for the appreciation of pluralism. He does this not by way of legitimating the various religions as Rahner does, but by way of emphasizing the Gospel's judgement on all human structures, including religious structures, and the consequent desirability of a secular society where people with different world-views can work together for the common good but without any common, over-arching unity of religious outlook¹³.

The weight of opinion then, is clearly in favor of a positive evaluation of pluralism. Yet the question should not be regarded as excluded from further consideration. It may be that a more balanced verdict is called for which would not give such whole-hearted approval to this new phenomenon. Professor Gensichen stresses the point that the mission must maintain the unconditionality of its hope and not let itself be tied to any world pattern in a final way, even though it must behave responsibly towards the world¹⁴. This warning needs to be applied to our thinking about pluralism before we embrace it unconditionally. There is much to be said by way of negative as well as positive evaluation and both sides need to be faced in making any over-all assessment.

An evaluation of pluralism must start with some evaluation of the old pattern of religious uniformity especially as that was displayed in Christendom, for it is partly in contrast to the evils of Christendom that pluralism is given its present approbation. We have lived long enough with Christendom to be well aware of its shortcomings. Where everyone espoused a single religion there was little consideration of alternatives and therefore religious profession tended to be unreflective. Where all were in the same church it was hard to distinguish between church and community and hence the church was no ecclesia. Community pressures were determinant in the realm of religion which made for a formal acceptance of religion without great conviction. Under Christendom's sway the Christian faith was identified with a particular culture and particular social pattern which meant that prophetic protest could be stifled and critical attitudes toward society could be seen as anti-Christian. All these evils of the old Christendom are well known and they enhance the attractiveness of pluralism.

Perhaps we need to be reminded, however, that there were also positive values in Christendom which need to be set over against these evils. Though it is true that much Christianity tended to be unreflective because there was no real choice involved, it is also true that a great deal of critical reflection on Christian faith was carried on. All the great theologians from the fourth century to the nineteenth are evidence of that critical reflection on the faith. Though it is true that the purely formal and superficial acceptance of the faith was widespread, it is also true that there was an amazing record of profundity and devotion evidenced in the endless number of great Christian souls of Medieval and Modern times. Louis IX, St. Theresa, Milton, Edwards, Wesley, Judson are among the names that come quickly to mind. It is certainly dubious whether our pluralistic age which should, theoretically, produce more profound and devoted Christians since they are Christians by choice rather than by social pressure, is in fact producing or is likely to produce people of comparable depth and quality.

Furthermore, it can hardly be said that the social pressures for Christian conformity succeeded in stifling the prophetic protest contained in Christianity. Movements like the Cluniac and Cistercian reforms, the Lollards, Hussites, Anabaptists, Puritans, Quakers and Abolitionists testify to the continued

vitality of the prophetic tradition through all the centuries of Christendom's dominance. The pluralistic world will do well if it can maintain that tradition as strongly and effectively as Christendom did.

An evaluation of pluralism, therefore, cannot be based solely on a recognition of the shortcomings of the previous pattern. Though there were indeed weaknesses in the past, there were also strengths. So pluralism will have to be evaluated in terms of its own strengths and weaknesses and not simply as the necessary cure for the evils of Christendom.

The positive values of pluralism immediately strike the eye. It provides for greater freedom in religion with real choices, not just theoretical choices, placed before people. It makes for a more world-wide outlook among people because they no longer live in religiously segregated areas that would narrow their viewpoints. From the perspective of Christian faith it accords well with the way in which God has come to humanity in Jesus Christ, not overwhelming us with force or irrefutable evidence, but appealing to us in love and freedom. Under pluralism there can be no imposition of Christian faith and this fits with the Christian understanding of faith as something which by its nature cannot be imposed. It is partly because of these facts that contemporary Christian thinkers have been so appreciative of pluralism, and there can be no denying that they have profound reasons for that appreciation.

Nevertheless, the negative side must also be recognized. Pluralism has its own inadequacies and evils which we must note.

Most obviously there is a weakness in the social fabric which is created by pluralism. People are not united at what they feel to be fundamental levels but only at practical, operational levels. The constant concern of those who write about pluralism is to find ways by which people of different faiths can live together harmoniously and create a society to which all can be loyal. Visser 't Hooft speaks of the difficulties of ruling a people without a common ethos¹⁵. These difficulties have become more obvious in more recent years and it is evident that many young people are therefore drawn toward societies which assert greater unity and authority even at the price of nearly all liberties. This may be an adumbration of the demise of pluralism. George Lindbeck has warned that where people have no commonly agreed standards of what is ultimately real or good and no filling of their daily life with a sense of ultimate purpose and meaning, they are likely to fall into hedonism leading to social disintegration, or else to turn to tyranny in order to establish a common world view¹⁶. That tyranny may not be explicitly religious but it will have to have implicit religious elements if it is to serve its purpose. Religious pluralism may turn out to be a short-lived phenomenon.

Further, religious pluralism pushes people toward a relativistic view of religions. Visser 't Hooft recognizes this as a temptation of pluralism¹⁷, and Cantwell Smith warns us against it¹⁸, but in light of past experiences with this phenomenon it is hardly likely that relativism will be avoided. It is not so much a temptation as it is an inherent defect of pluralism. This relativism must almost necessarily be combined with some kind of civil religion which is to be

accepted by all and which is to fill the need for a common world view if the society is not to follow the above mentioned road toward disintegration and tyranny. The Roman Empire with its multiplicity of faiths showed this pattern. Relativism was generally assumed. In Gibbon's famous phrase:

The various modes of worship, which prevailed in the Roman world, were all considered by the people as equally true; by the philosopher, as equally false; and by the magistrate, as equally useful¹⁹.

But above this relativism there stood the cult of emperor worship which was a kind of civil religion in which all were required to join.

The same sort of thing has happened in East Asia where Buddhism and Confucianism and Taoism or Shintoism have dwelt together peaceably for many centuries in pluralistic societies. The religions have adopted relativist attitudes as part of their common doctrine. It is said that "all roads lead to the top of Mt. Fuji", that individuals have their chosen paths of religious belief and devotion, but that in the end they all lead to the Absolute. Contemporary Buddhist and Confucian writers on world pluralism stress the long experience their faiths have had with this type of social situation and the contribution which they are therefore peculiarly prepared to make to it. That contribution turns out to be a relativist point of view on all religion, a sense of the complementary of opposites — the Yin and the Yang — into which all truth claims can be absorbed²⁰.

Yet, as Joseph Kitagawa has shown, underlying all these relativistically viewed religions is a basic, common religion which all must accept. In Japan, under the Shinto-Confucian synthesis, everyone pledged ultimate loyalty to the throne and the nation. There was an assumption of the unity of religion and government. In the seventh century the government even assigned particular roles to Shinto, Buddhism and Confucianism. Later, Buddhism was established as the state religion²¹. In China Confucianism was part and parcel of the whole government system, linking the hierarchies of earth to Heaven and providing an overarching framework within which Taoist, Buddhist and Confucian religious rites and beliefs could be maintained.

Hindu India, which has always been something of a congeries of religions with very different doctrines and practices, has also always been the very heartland of relativism in religion. Not only Hindu scholars but the ordinary Hindu believers have consistently maintained a conviction that each religion was helpful or useful to its own group of followers but that in the end it did not matter which way was taken as long as it was accepted conscientiously and followed faithfully. Again, with this relativism, there was a kind of civil religion represented by the belief in karma, rebirth and the divinely ordained caste system. Caste rules were iron-clad and people were required to adhere to them meticulously at the same time that they were free to follow the beliefs of their choice regarding any transcendent reality or ultimate salvation.

It is interesting to note that Thomas More when he was drawing the picture of his Utopia arrived at a similar result. He envisioned a society in which people

worshiped different deities, the stars or the sun, with most believing in a single being they called Father. They thought that God might desire worship and that if any one religion were true its truth would finally be perceived by all. Yet their rulers also declared that none should believe that the world was the sport of mere chance or that there was no punishment or reward after this life. Such a non-believer would be ostracized and would not be allowed to present his views before the common people but only before the learned and the priests. In addition to the worship of the various religions there was public worship in the temples which fitted with what all held in common²². It is easy to discern here a relativism with regard to the many religions and also the establishment of a civil religion over them all. This is hardly what would be expected from the pen of a sixteenth-century Catholic. It must be recognized that More may have been more interested in ridiculing the ways of sixteenth-century Europe than in depicting his ideal for society.

The United States has often been looked to as a pioneer for the Western world in the sphere of religious pluralism, not in this case an interreligious pluralism but a pluralism of Christian churches with no ecclesiastical establishment. It is significant therefore that in America there has developed most fully a relativism regarding Christian denominations. Except for the Catholics and some strongly ethnic groups, most Americans have regarded denominational choice as a matter of individual preference, or even convenience, being quite ready to change denominations and feeling that it did not really matter much which denomination a person might belong to. This was not the common attitude in the early history of the United States but has become increasingly the attitude as the people have lived longer in a pluralist situation. Along with this there has grown up a civil religion with its own saints and heroes and special days and sacred writings. In fact the very term, "civil religion", has been used most frequently in reference to the American scene.

With such a uniformity in historical experience there would seem to be very little doubt as to the direction in which we will be going in our religious beliefs as our societies become more and more pluralistic. We will in all probability shift toward relativism and some kind of "civil religion". However, there are examples in history of an alternative form of adjustment to pluralism which is less common and therefore less likely for us, but still important to note. This form is that of isolation and encystment of a religious group. Those few religious people who refuse to adopt the common relativism gradually shut themselves off from the general culture. They stay within their own circle and build walls around their group. Where the religions that are living together are particularly averse to relativism, this alternative pattern is more likely to be adopted. In the Middle East, Islam and Christianity have lived together for centuries and both are religions which resist relativism. The result has been the encystment of the minority community, the Christians. They have lived to themselves in their own church groups. From the time of the Caliph Omar (634–644) down to the twentieth-century Turkish Empire, their ingrown ecclesiastical bodies were recognized as legal entities, called *millet*s, which

operated the religious institutions, the schools and the hospitals of their particular sects under the control of their officially recognized religious heads. Christians to preserve their faith and their identity in a society where conversion could go only one way, towards Islam, strengthened the walls around themselves and resisted any suggestion of contact with their neighbors.

One may see evidence of the alternative impacts of pluralism already among Christians. The main body of church people, those who are fully part of the larger culture, are showing signs of increasing relativism in their thinking.

Contemporary dialogues between important representatives of different faiths and discussions among Christian scholars both reveal a relativizing trend²³. On the other hand those groups of Christians who are less in touch with the larger cultural arena and who want to keep pure "the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints"²⁴, are tending to form a sub-culture of their own in isolation from the wider currents, meeting only with each other and suspicious of the larger group of Christians.

Pluralism then, it would seem, has its own inadequacies as Christendom had its own. And each has its values and strengths. What then should be our stance toward it? Clearly simple approbation is unsupportable, and outright condemnation is equally to be avoided. We may, by some *tour de force* be able to strike an acceptable tentative judgement somewhere between these extremes, but the facts to be judged are so broad in their sweep and so indeterminable in their long-range effects that even this seems doubtful. Only a person in the position of God Himself would be able to balance the various considerations fairly and deliver any final judgement on them. Perhaps then it is more fitting for us to refrain from any over-all judgement on pluralism. Perhaps it is sufficient for us to recognize the basic fact that each age has its distinctive patterns which present their own possibilities and their own problems and that in the course of rising to those possibilities and meeting those problems new things are to be learned about God, about the world and about the Christian faith. We can therefore, without reaching any over-all judgement, welcome the patterns of our time as offering much to us by way both of opportunity and of challenge which comes from the goodness of God. In so far as pluralism is the pattern of society which is likely to flourish in our time we should, as Cantwell Smith says, set our faces deliberately and joyously in that direction and not pine for the patterns of the past. But this is not the joyousness of facing a picnic; rather it is the joyousness of facing an opportunity to be seized and a challenge to be met. We accept pluralism heartily – but not wholeheartedly – convinced that our calling under God is to bring out the values and to minimize the evils which it offers.

If this is the stance we take, then there are very clear and important consequences for Christian missions which we need to recognize. Once we are committed to bringing out the values and minimizing the evils of pluralism, it is missions that emerge as the most effective way of doing both those things. To be sure the pluralist situation will produce difficulties for missions and we should not blink that fact. Both the tendencies within pluralism which

we have described, the major one toward relativism and civil religion and the minor one toward isolation and encystment, are contrary to the whole outlook of missions. It should not surprise us, therefore, that we can see a decided weakening of mission efforts in recent years. The weakening is partly the result of economic difficulties and political pressures, but it is also the result of changing perspectives within the Christian faith, changes brought on by growing relativism or isolationism. Yet mission is especially needed in this time when it is especially difficult.

First, let us see the ways in which mission can accentuate the benefits of pluralism. We have noted that one of those benefits is the religious liberty which pluralism makes possible. It makes choices real which otherwise would be only theoretical even in a free society. Mission, too, means living in terms of freedom of choice. The whole missionary appeal to people makes no sense if they have no freedom of choice. Missions have normally pled for religious freedom, as the early missionaries to British India were wont to do and as the world-wide study of religious freedom sponsored by the International Missionary Council made clear²⁵. In this respect mission is designed to support and strengthen one of the great values of pluralism. It will work to maintain and develop religious freedom in every society.

A second benefit of pluralism which is strengthened by missions is the cross-cultural, world-embracing outlook which it fosters. Pluralist societies have, as we have noted, a tendency to cosmopolitan contacts and interests rather than parochial concerns and limited horizons. Missions likewise are concerned to transcend parochial mentalities and to foster an interest in all humanity on all six continents. Thus they will enhance this tendency in pluralism. True, the six-continent philosophy of missions is something which has been articulated only in recent years, but in reality Christian missions have been working on all six continents as long as those continents have been known to Christians, and the fact that some of these missions have been called "home missions" and some have been called "foreign missions" should not disguise the reality. Here too, then, mission accentuates the benefits of pluralism.

But mission also counteracts the evils of the pluralist society. Mission obviously means a refusal to withdraw into isolation and encystment. A minority church which does not follow the prevailing trends of culture will always be tempted to turn in upon itself. The missionary forces in the church should be the antidote to that tendency. Some of the leaders of Asian churches which are tiny minorities in their countries have been serving as excellent guides in this respect. They have frequently stressed that their small churches can have very little significance if they stay to themselves, but they can be of great significance if they devote themselves to serving their fellow human beings of all faiths, if they take the role of the suffering servant, helping the poor and resisting the tyrannies and hatreds that grow in their societies. A missionary church cannot, by definition, be isolated and encysted.

Furthermore mission counteracts the opposite danger of pluralism, namely relativism. It assumes that there are important choices to be made in the realm

of religion. It involves the proclamation of good news which is essential for all people. In so far as mission can be maintained in a pluralist society the tendency to relativism will be weakened. One of the tasks that missionary Christians will constantly be required to perform in a pluralist environment will be to defend their missionary activity when people around them commonly assume that "it is enough that everyone has his own religion" and "it doesn't matter what you believe, it only matters that you believe". Many Christians already, because of these relativist assumptions, regard missions as illegitimate and the numbers of such Christians can be counted on to increase as pluralism spreads. A missionary outlook will be harder to maintain but it will be more important and more socially significant than it has been in the past. By it the relativist tendencies of the majority will be continually challenged.

That other tendency of pluralism, to move toward some kind of civil religion, should also run up against resistance in the operation of missions. People feel the need for a civil religion in order to hold their society together, to make it easier to work together and to make decisions together where there is a variety of religious assumptions. This is an understandable need and missions should be able to appreciate it. In the process of working in multi-religious societies they have at times had to recognize the importance of certain common principles which could be appealed to in the effort to secure fair treatment and protection from discrimination²⁶. So they can acknowledge a modest role for something like civil religion. But they will also be a force which helps to keep that religion from becoming all absorbing and oppressive. Since they represent a non-relativist type of Christian faith they cannot allow any final authority for the civil religion or offer any final loyalties to it even in earthly matters. This can be a crucial contribution to keeping the pluralist society open and humane.

The long experience which Christian missions have had in cooperative work with people of other faiths suggests that they have already developed a pattern of pluralist life without relativism and without civil religion. In mission schools, hospitals, rural programs, development efforts and other services Christians have found themselves cooperating continually with people of other religions in serving the common good. This experience is not so useful for future pluralist situations, however, as might appear. The pattern has too often been one of Christian domination rather than real cooperation. Missionaries have all too often claimed that their work was "Christian" because it was planned and paid for and led by Christians, and they have ignored the fact that it was only the steady help and participation of many other people which enabled the work to go forward. The spread of religious pluralism, where the voices of all groups are heard, should awaken Christian missions to the realities of their work and make them recognize and treat the non-Christians as the partners which they really are. Pluralism at this point will render a special and needed service to missions, but missions will also at the same time be rendering a special and needed service to the pluralist society by steering it away from some of the allures of civil religion.

The challenge of the coming years will be to maintain missions at all in the face of the powerful tendencies of pluralism. They can hardly expect to be the popular expression of Christian life which they have been in the generations just passed. But if they can evoke commitment from even a dedicated minority in the church they will make it clear that the pluralizing of the world need not mean, in Professor Gensichen's words, a "total relativism or syncretism for all people", nor a destruction of "the certainty of belief nor the missionary conviction of truth"²⁷. In this they will have rendered a signal service.

Notes

1. *Glaube für die Welt*, 1971, 34, 36-37.
2. *Ch. W. Forman: A History of Foreign Mission Theory in America*, in: *R.P. Beaver (ed.): American Missions in Bicentennial Perspective*, 1977, 69-140.
3. *E. Jurji: Religious Pluralism and World Community*, 1969.
4. *Huston Smith: in: Jurji, op. cit.* 26.
5. *W.C. Smith: The Faith of Other Men*, 1963.
6. *Ibid.* 108.
7. *K. Cragg: A Theology of Religious Pluralism, Christianity in World Perspective*, 1968, 64-89.
8. *Ibid.* 65, 71.
9. *W.A. Visser 't Hooft: Ökumenische Bilanz*, 1966, 226-248.
10. *Theological Investigations*, 1966, V. 115.
11. *Ibid.* 133.
12. *Ibid.* 121-125.
13. *Christianity in World History*, 1964.
14. *Op. cit.* note 1, 98-100.
15. *W.A. Visser 't Hooft, op. cit.* 234.
16. *G. Lindbeck: Ecumenism and the Future of Belief*, in: *Una Sancta* 1968, 3-17.
17. *W.A. Visser 't Hooft, op. cit.* 238-239.
18. *W.C. Smith, op. cit.* 13.
19. *E. Gibbon: The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, 1932, 25-26.
20. *K.N. Jayatilleke: Buddhist Relativity and the One-World Concept*, und *Wing-Tsit Chan: The Historic Chinese Contribution to Religious Pluralism and World Community*, in: *E. Jurji, op. cit.* note 3.
21. *New Religions in Japan: A Historical Perspective*, in: *R.I. Spencer (ed.): Religion and Change in Contemporary Asia*, 1971, 38.
22. *Thomas More: Utopia*, 1963, 217-233.
23. *Towards World Community: The Colombo Papers*, *S.J. Samartha (ed.)*, 1975, 119-125; *J. Hick: Truth and Dialogue in World Religions: Conflicting Truth Claims*, 1974, 140-155.
24. *Jude* 3.
25. *M.S. Bates: Religious Liberty: an Inquiry*, 1945.
26. *B. Leeming* makes this point in connection with the protests of Christians against discrimination in Egypt. *The Churches and the Church*, 1960. 231.
27. *Gensichen, op. cit.* note 1, 37.

✓ very perceptive !!

Joseph B. Bustillos
MT 533: Theology of Religious Encounter
January 25, 1985

Essay Review: The Gospel Among the Religions, by Leeslie Newbigin.

Leeslie Newbigin is a champion at the art of "roller-coaster" writing. A very well paced and structured essay, we pulls the right strings at the right times. Time and again he will make an Orthodox Christian statement, then pull the rug out from under it in the next paragraph. A very interesting writer. I'm not sure what he wants us to believe.

After presenting five basic answers to his question about Christians' attitude toward other religions (based on the knowledge of a Christian's presuppositions), he presents a vision of Christianity that is emasculated, not knowing the end result of what it preaches. He says, "Here emphasis is always on surprise" (p. 9), speaking about the New Testament's "caution" towards pronouncing those that will inherit the Kingdom. He fails to see the difference between a Righteousness that is based on personal merit (the type touted by the Pharisees and sometimes foolish Christians) and a Righteousness that is given a gift of God's good grace. Taking God at his word one must conclude that the recipient of such a pronouncement of Righteousness (type B) is Righteous. And guess what their eternal destiny will be. No surprise here.

At this point it tends to get worse. Left with a Christianity that knows very little of its ultimate destiny and obviously nothing of the destiny of the non-Christian we are left with a faith that says, "I meet him simply as a witness, as one who has been laid hold of by Another and placed in a position where I can only point to Jesus as the one who can make sense of the whole human situation which my partner and I share as fellow human beings. This is the basis of our meeting." (10) And nothing more.

He seems quite interested to get Christianity back on the ground, we're sinners just like the rest of the world and the sooner we forget that the sooner we cut off the power that is in Christianity and our leverage (though he'd never use that word) to witness. That much is very valuable to remember. The rest I can do without.

MISSION TRENDS No.5

FAITH MEETS FAITH

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The Gospel Among the Religions

Lesslie Newbigin

If the Christian meets a neighbor of another faith on the basis of a commitment to Jesus Christ as the true light and true life, what understanding of other faiths is implied by the Christian in such a meeting?

Lesslie Newbigin, former missionary bishop to the Church of South India, samples and evaluates various Christian answers. They range from "Other religions and ideologies are wholly false and the Christian has nothing to learn from them" to "Non-Christian religions are the means through which God's saving will reaches those who have not yet been reached by the gospel" to "Leave ultimate salvation questions to the wise mercy of God."

Newbigin argues that in dialogue the Christian meets the person of another faith without prior knowledge of ultimate destinies. "I meet him simply as a witness, as one who has been laid hold of by Another and placed in a position where I can only point to Jesus as the one who can make sense of the whole human situation which my partner and I share as fellow human beings." Furthermore, says Newbigin, the Christian should engage in dialogue not "as one who possesses the truth and the holiness of God but as one who bears witness to a truth and holiness which are God's judgment on him and who is ready to hear the judgment spoken through the lips and life of his partner of another faith."

The purpose of dialogue, then, suggests a trinitarian model. It is "obedient witness to Jesus Christ . . . who is glorified as the living Holy Spirit takes all that the Father has given to man . . . and declares it to the church as that which belongs to Christ as Lord." Bishop Newbigin

concludes that "In this encounter the church is changed, the world is changed, and Christ is glorified."

Lesslie Newbigin was Former Associate General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, and Professor of Mission at Selly Oak Colleges in Birmingham, England. This essay is from his book, *The Open Secret: Sketches for a Missionary Theology*, published and copyrighted by Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. (Grand Rapids, Mich. 1978), pp. 190-206.

The Christian goes to meet his neighbor of another religion on the basis of his commitment to Jesus Christ. There is no dichotomy between "confession" and "truth-seeking." His confession is the starting point of his truth-seeking. He meets his partner with the expectation and hope of hearing more of truth. But inevitably he will seek to grasp the new truth offered him by means of those ways of thinking and judging and valuing which he has already learned and tested. The presuppositions which shape his thinking will be those which he draws from the gospel. This must be quite explicit. He cannot agree that the position of final authority can be taken by anything other than the gospel—either by a philosophical system, or by mystical experience, or by the requirements of national and global unity. Confessing Christ—incarnate, crucified, and risen—as the true light and the true life, he cannot accept any other alleged authority as having right of way over this. He cannot regard the revelation given in Jesus as one of a type or as requiring interpretation by means of categories based on other ways of understanding the totality of experience. Jesus is for the believer the source from whom his understanding of the totality of experience is drawn and therefore the criterion by which other ways of understanding are judged.

In this respect the Christian will be in the same position as his partners in dialogue. The Hindu, the Muslim, the Buddhist, the Marxist—each has his distinctive interpretation of other religions, including Christianity, and the faith of each provides the basis of his own understanding of the totality of experience and, therefore, the criterion by which other

ways of understanding, including that of the Christian, are judged. The integrity and fruitfulness of the interfaith dialogue depends in the first place upon the extent to which the different participants take seriously the full reality of their own faiths as sources for the understanding of the totality of experience.

I

If this is the basis upon which the Christian participates in the dialogue, what understanding of other faiths does this imply? Many different answers have been given and are given to this question. Many volumes would be needed to state and examine them. The following is only a sample of answers for the purpose of orientation.

1. Other religions and ideologies are wholly false and the Christian has nothing to learn from them. On this three things may be said.

(a) The sensitive Christian mind, enlightened by Christ, cannot fail to recognize and to rejoice in the abundant spiritual fruits to be seen in the lives of men and women of other faiths. Here we must simply appeal to the witness of Christians in all ages who have lived in friendship with those of other faiths.

(b) In almost all cases where the Bible has been translated into the languages of the non-Christian peoples of the world, the New Testament word *Theos* has been rendered by the name given by the non-Christian peoples to the one whom they worship as the Supreme Being. It is under this name, therefore, that the Christians who now use these languages worship the God and Father of Jesus Christ. The very few exceptions, where translators have sought to evade the issue by simply transliterating the Greek or Hebrew word, only serve to prove the point; for the converts have simply explained the foreign word in the text of their Bibles by using the indigenous name for God. (I owe this piece of information to a conversation with Dr. Eugene Nida.) The name of the God revealed in Jesus Christ can only be known by using those names for God which have been developed within the

Understanding
based on a know-
of one's basic
not knowledge
presuppositions

non-Christian systems of belief and worship. It is therefore impossible to claim that there is a total discontinuity between the two.

(c) John tells us that Jesus is the light that lightens every man. This text does not say anything about other *religions*, but it makes it impossible for the Christian to say that those outside the church are totally devoid of the truth.

2. The non-Christian religions are the work of devils and their similarities to Christianity are the results of demonic cunning. This view is stated by Justin in his *Apology* and is linked by him with the assertion that the Logos speaking through Socrates and others sought to lead men to the light and away from the work of demons—the Logos who was made man in Jesus Christ. A sharp distinction is here drawn between pagan religions (the work of demons) and pagan philosophy (in which the Logos was shedding his light). Two points should be made regarding this view.

(a) It would be wise to recognize an element of truth here: the sphere of religions is the battlefield *par excellence* of the demonic. New converts often surprise missionaries by the horror and fear with which they reject the forms of their old religion—forms which to the secularized Westerner are interesting pieces of folklore and which to the third-generation successors of the first converts may come to be prized as part of national culture. Religion, including the Christian religion, can be the sphere in which evil exhibits a power against which human reason and conscience are powerless. For religion is the sphere in which a man surrenders himself to something greater than himself.

(b) Even the strange idea that the similarities to Christianity in the non-Christian religions are evidences of demonic cunning points to an important truth. It is precisely at points of highest ethical and spiritual achievement that the religions find themselves threatened by, and therefore ranged against, the gospel. It was the guardians of God's revelation who crucified the Son of God. It is the noblest among the Hindus who most emphatically reject the gospel. It is those who say, "We see," who seek to blot out the light (John 9:41).

3. Other religions are a preparation for Christ: the gospel fulfills them! This way of understanding the matter was strong in Protestant missionary circles in the early years of this century and is fully expressed in the volume of the Edinburgh Conference of 1910 on *The Missionary Message*. The non-Christian religions can be seen as preparation for the gospel, either as the "revelation of deep wants of the human spirit" which the gospel satisfies, or as partial insights which are corrected and completed by the gospel.² Obviously such a view can be discussed only on the basis of an intimate and detailed knowledge of mankind's religions. There is indeed a vast missionary literature, mainly written in the first half of this century, which studies the religions from this point of view. Briefly, one has to say that this view had to be abandoned because, in R. Otto's phrase, the different religions turn on different axes. The questions Hinduism asks and answers are not the questions with which the gospel is primarily concerned. One does not truly understand any of the religions by seeing it as a preparation for Christianity. Rather, each religion must be understood on its own terms and along the line of its own central axis.

4. A distinct but related view of the matter, the one dominant at the Jerusalem Conference of 1928, seeks "values" in the religions and claims that while many values are indeed to be found in them, it is only in Christianity that all values are found in their proper balance and relationship. The final statement of the council lists such spiritual values—"the sense of the Majesty of God" in Islam, "the deep sympathy for the world's sorrow" in Buddhism, the "desire for contact with ultimate reality" in Hinduism, "the belief in a moral order of the universe" in Confucianism, and "disinterested pursuit of truth and of human welfare" in secular civilization—as "part of the one Truth."³ And yet, as the same statement goes on to say, Christ is not merely the continuation of human traditions: coming to him involves the surrender of the most precious traditions. The "values" of the religions do not together add up to him who alone is the truth.

5. A different picture of the relation between Christianity

and the other religions is given in Pope Paul VI's encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam* (1964). Here the world religions are seen as concentric circles having the Roman Catholic church at the center and other Christians, Jews, Muslims, other theists, other religionists, and atheists at progressively greater distances. In respect of this proposal one must repeat that the religions cannot be rightly understood by looking at them in terms of their distance from Christianity. They must be understood, so to speak, from within, on their own terms. And one must add that this model particularly fails to do justice to the paradoxical fact central to the whole issue that it is precisely those who are in one sense closest to the truth who are in another sense the bitterest opponents of the gospel. Shall we say that the priest and the Levite, guardians of God's true revelation, are nearer to the center than the semipagan Samaritan?

6. Recent Roman Catholic writing affirms that the non-Christian religions are the means through which God's saving will reaches those who have not yet been reached by the gospel. Karl Rahner argues as follows: God purposes the salvation of all men. Therefore he communicates himself by grace to all men, "and these influences can be presumed to be accepted in spite of the sinful state of men." Since a saving religion must necessarily be social, it follows that the non-Christian religions have a positive salvific significance. In this respect they are parallel to the Judaism of the Old Testament, which, though it was a mixture of truth and error, was until the coming of Christ "the lawful religion willed by God for them." The adherent of a non-Christian religion is thus regarded as an anonymous Christian. But a Christian who is explicitly so, "has a much greater chance of salvation than someone who is merely an anonymous Christian."⁴

This scheme is vulnerable at many points. The devout adherent of another religion will rightly say that to call him an anonymous Christian is to fail to take his faith seriously. The argument from the universal saving purpose of God to the salvific efficiency of non-Christian religions assumes, without proving, that it is religion among all the activities of the human spirit which is the sphere of God's saving action. The

unique revelation to Jesus Christ of the Old Testament is not adequately recognized.

Its most serious weakness, however, is one which is shared in some degree by the other views we have examined: it assumes that our position as Christians entitles us to know and declare what is God's final judgment upon other people.

On the question of the ultimate salvation of those who have never heard the gospel, most contemporary Protestant writers are content to say that it is a matter to be left to the wise mercy of God. Some contemporary Roman Catholics (Hans Küng, for example) rebuke the attitude as a failure to do one's theological duty. Küng even uses the word "supercilious" to characterize this unwillingness to announce in advance the outcome of Judgment Day.⁵ I must confess, on the other hand, that I find it astonishing that a theologian should think he has the authority to inform us in advance who is going to be "saved" on the last day. It is not accidental that these ecclesiastical announcements are always moralistic in tone: it is the "men of good will," the "sincere" followers of other religions, the "observers of the law" who are informed in advance that their seats in heaven are securely booked. This is the exact opposite of the teaching of the New Testament. Here emphasis is always on surprise. It is the sinners who will be welcomed and those who were confident that their place was secure who will find themselves outside. God will shock the righteous by his limitless generosity and by his tremendous severity. The ragged beggars from the lanes and ditches will be in the festal hall, and the man who thought his own clothes were good enough will find himself thrown out (Matt. 22:1-14). The honest, hard-working lad will be out in the dark while the young scoundrel is having a party in his father's house (Luke 15). The branch that was part of the vine will be cut off and burned (John 15). There will be astonishment both among the saved and among the lost (Matt. 25:31-46). And so we are warned to judge nothing before the time (I Cor. 4:1-5). To refuse to answer the question which our Lord himself refused to answer (Luke 13:23-30) is not "supercilious"; it is simply honest.

This is not a small matter. It determines the way in

confusing those
that consider
themselves
righteous by
merit & those
by faith -
take God
at his word.

which we approach the man of another faith. It is almost impossible for me to enter into simple, honest, open, and friendly communication with another person as long as I have at the back of my mind the feeling that I am one of the saved and he is one of the lost. Such a gulf is too vast to be bridged by any ordinary human communication. But the problem is not really solved if I decide from my side of the abyss that he also is saved. In either case the assumption is that I have access to the secret of his ultimate destiny. If I were a Hindu, I do not think that even a decision by an ecumenical Christian council that good Hindus can be saved would enable me to join in ordinary human conversation with a Christian about our ultimate beliefs. All such pronouncements go beyond our authority and destroy the possibility of a real meeting. The truth is that my meeting with a person of another religion is on a much humbler basis. I do not claim to know in advance his ultimate destiny. I meet him simply as a witness, as one who has been laid hold of by Another and placed in a position where I can only point to Jesus as the one who can make sense of the whole human situation which my partner and I share as fellow human beings. This is the basis of our meeting.

II.

How, from this starting point, do I begin to understand the religion of my partner?

1. Believing that in Jesus God himself is present in the fullness of his being, I am committed to believing that every part of the created world and every human being are already related to Jesus. John expressed this by saying that Jesus is the Word through whom all things came to be, that he is the life of all that is, and that he is the light that gives light to every man. To say this is to affirm that the presence and work of Jesus are not confined within the area where he is acknowledged. John also says, in the same breath, that the light shines in the darkness and that the darkness has not mastered it. His whole Gospel is the elucidation of that statement in terms of actual history. This is not a sort of Christ-monism:

there is light and there is darkness. But light shines on the darkness to the uttermost; there is no point at which light stops and darkness begins, unless the light has been put under a bushel. When the light shines freely one cannot draw a line and say, "Here light stops and darkness begins." But one can and must say, "There is where the light shines; go towards it and your path will be clear; turn your back on it and you will go into deeper darkness." One can and must do what John the Baptist did; one can and must "bear witness to the light."

The Christian confession of Jesus as Lord does not involve any attempt to deny the reality of the work of God in the lives and thoughts and prayers of men and women outside the Christian church. On the contrary, it ought to involve an eager expectation of, a looking for, and a rejoicing in the evidence of that work. There is something deeply wrong when Christians imagine that loyalty to Jesus requires them to belittle the manifest presence of the light in the lives of men and women who do not acknowledge him, to seek out points of weakness, to ferret out hidden sins and deceptions as a means of commending the gospel. If we love the light and walk in the light we will also rejoice in the light wherever we find it—even the smallest gleams of it in the surrounding darkness.

Here I am thinking, let it be clearly understood, not only of the evidences of light in the religious life of non-Christians, the steadfastness and costliness of the devotion which so often puts Christians to shame; I am thinking also of the no less manifest evidences of the shining of the light in the lives of atheists, humanists, Marxists, and others who have explicitly rejected the message and the fellowship of the church. "The light" is not to be identified with the religious life of men; religion is in fact too often the sphere of darkness, Christian religion not excluded. The parable of the Good Samaritan is a sharp and constantly needed reminder to the godly of all faiths that the boundary between religion and its absence is by no means to be construed as the boundary between light and darkness.

Christians then, in their dealing with men and women

*Theological note
in being
based
"light"*

*What does this mean?
Is there then
a surety of
salvation - can God
be taken on his word?*

who do not acknowledge Jesus as Lord, will meet them and share with them in a common life, not as strangers but as those who live by the same life-giving Word, and in whom the same life-giving light shines. They will recognize and rejoice in the evidences they find of a response to the same God from whom alone life and light come. They will join with their non-Christian neighbors in all that serves life against death and light against darkness. They will expect to learn as well as to teach, to receive as well as to give, in this common human enterprise of living and building up a common life. They will not be eager to have their particular contributions to the common human task separately labeled as "Christian." They will be happy only if what they do can serve the reign and righteousness of the Father of Jesus who loves all, gives life to all, and purposes the blessing of all.

2. But having said this, having joyfully and gratefully acknowledged all the goodness to be found in every part of the whole human family, it is necessary to go on to say that there is a dark side to this bright picture. The most dark and terrible thing about human nature is our capacity to take the good gifts of God and make them into an instrument to cut ourselves off from God, to establish our independence from God. All the impulses towards good, all the experiences of God's grace, and all the patterns of conduct and of piety which grow from these, can be and have constantly been made the basis for a claim on our own behalf, a claim that we have, so to speak, a standing in our own right. And so, in the name of all that is best in the moral and spiritual experience of the race, we cut ourselves off from the life which God intends for us—a life of pure and childlike confidence in the superabundant kindness of God. This is the tragic story which was enacted in the ministry of Jesus, when—in the name of all that was best and highest in the law and piety of the time—the incarnate Lord was rejected and condemned to death. This is the story which Paul repeats in many different ways, and above all in three chapters (9–11) of the letter to the Romans. It is the story which has been constantly repeated in the history of the church when Christians believe they have, in virtue of their faith and baptism, a claim upon

God which others do not have and when they refuse to accept the plain meaning of the teaching of the apostle that there is no distinction between Christian and pagan because the same Lord is Lord of all and bestows his riches upon all who call upon him (Rom. 10:12).

The cross of Jesus is on the one hand the exposure of this terrible face and, on the other hand, God's way of meeting it. For, as Paul teaches in many places, while at the cross our human righteousness and piety found themselves ranged in murderous enmity against the God whom they proposed to honor, in that same deed we were offered another kind of righteousness—the righteousness which is God's gift, the relationship of total reconciliation with God present in his own person in the one who is condemned and crucified by our righteousness. This unique historic deed, which we confess as the true turning point of universal history, stands throughout history as witness against all the claims of religion—including the Christian religion—to be the means of salvation. Contrary to much of the teaching we have reviewed, we have to insist that religion is *not* the means of salvation. The message of Jesus, of the unique incarnate Lord crucified by the powers of law, morals, and piety and raised to the throne of cosmic authority, confronts the claim of every religion with a radical negation. We cannot escape this. Jesus comes to the representatives of the highest in human spirituality, as he came to Saul of Tarsus, as one who threatens the most sacred ground on which they stand. He appears as the saboteur, the subverter of the law. It is only after his unconditional claim has been accepted that a man in Christ, like Paul the apostle, can look back and see that Christ has not destroyed the law but fulfilled it.

The experience of Paul is mirrored in that of many converts from Hindu and Muslim faith with whom I have discussed this matter. At the point of crisis Jesus appeared to them as one who threatened all that was most sacred to them. In the light of their experience of life in Christ they now look back and see that he has safeguarded and fulfilled it. To put the matter in another way: the revelation of God's saving love and power in Jesus entitles and requires me to believe that

God purposes the salvation of all men, but it does not entitle me to believe that this purpose is to be accomplished in any way which ignores or bypasses the historic event by which it was in fact revealed and effected.

3. The accomplishment of this saving purpose is to be by way of and through a real history—a history whose center is defined by the events which took place “under Pontius Pilate.” The end envisaged is the reconciliation of all things in heaven and earth in Christ (Col. 1:20), the “summing up of all things in Christ” (Eph. 1:10), the liberation of the entire creation from its bondage (Rom. 8:19–21). The object to which God’s purpose of grace is directed is the whole creation and the whole human family, not human souls conceived as billions of separate monads each detached from its place in the whole fabric of the human and natural world. To think in this way and then to engage in speculations about which of these monads will finally reach the goal and which will not is to distort the biblical picture out of all recognition. The salvation which is promised in Christ and of which his bodily resurrection is the firstfruit, is not to be conceived simply as the fulfillment of the personal spiritual history of each individual human being. To speak in this way is to depart both from Scripture and from a true understanding of what it is to be a person. We are fully persons only with and through others, and in Christ we know that our personal history is so rooted in Christ that there can be no final salvation for each of us until he has “seen of the travail of his soul” and is satisfied (Isa. 53:11). The New Testament itself suggests at many points the need for the patience this requires (Heb. 11:39–40; Rev. 6:9–11). The logic which leads the writer to the Hebrews to say of the saints of former days that “apart from us they should not be made perfect” surely did not cease to operate with the first century. We must equally say that we, and all who are called to the service of God’s universal promise of blessing, cannot be made perfect, cannot be saved apart from all who have not yet had the opportunity to respond to the promise. This is the theological context, surely, in which we should try to understand the place in God’s purpose of all

those millions who have lived and died out of reach of the story which we believe to be the clue to universal history.

4. Because this salvation is a real consummation of universal history and not simply the separate consummation of individual personal lives conceived as abstracted from the public life of which they are a part, it follows that an essential part of the history of salvation is the history of the bringing into obedience to Christ of the rich multiplicity of ethical, cultural, and spiritual treasures which God has lavished upon mankind. The way in which this is to be understood is shown in the well-known verses from the fourth Gospel.

I have yet many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you (John 16:12–15)

We can spell out what is said here in a threefold form.

(a) What can be given to and grasped by this group of first-century Jews is limited by the time and place and circumstances of their lives. It is true knowledge of the only true God and in that sense it is the full revelation of God (John 17:3, 6). But it is not yet the fullness of all that is to be manifested.

(b) It will be the work of the Holy Spirit to lead this little community, limited as it now is within the narrow confines of a single time and place and culture, into “the truth as a whole” and specifically into an understanding of “the things that are to come”—the world history that is still to be enacted.

(c) This does not mean, however, that they will be led beyond or away from Jesus. Jesus is the Word made flesh, the Word by which all that is came to be, and is sustained in being. Consequently all the gifts which the Father has

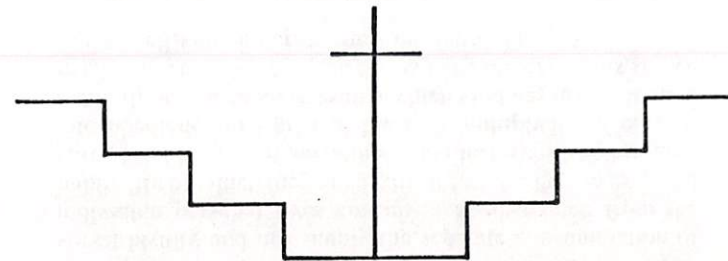
lavished on mankind belong in fact to Jesus, and it will be the work of the Spirit to restore them to their true owner. All these gifts will be truly received and understood when the Holy Spirit takes them and declares their true meaning and use to the church.

We have here the outline of the way in which we are to understand the witness of the church in relation to all the gifts which God has bestowed upon mankind. It does not suggest that the church go into the world as the body with nothing to receive and everything to give. Quite the contrary: the church has yet much to learn. This passage suggests a trinitarian model which will guide our thinking as we proceed. The Father is the giver of all things. They all belong rightly to the Son. It will be the work of the Spirit to guide the church through the course of history into the truth as a whole by taking all God's manifold gifts given to all mankind and declaring their true meaning to the church as that which belongs to the Son. The end to which it all looks is "a plan for the fulness of time, to unite all things to him, things in heaven and things on earth" (Eph. 1:10). The apostle, looking at the marvelous events by which the Gentiles who were outside of the covenant have been brought into it and made members of the household of God, can see in them the signs of the accomplishment of this purpose. As we, from a longer experience of the church's mission to all the nations, look back upon the story of the church and trace its encounter first with the rich culture of the Hellenic world and then with one after another of the cultures of mankind, we can see, with many distractions and perversions and misunderstandings, the beginnings of the fulfillment of this promise.

5. The church, therefore, as it is *in via*, does not face the world as the exclusive possessor of salvation, nor as the fullness of what others have in part, the answer to the questions they ask, or the open revelation of what they are anonymously. The church faces the world, rather, as *arrabōn* of that salvation—as sign, firstfruit, token, witness of that salvation which God purposes for the whole. It can do so only because it lives by the Word and sacraments of the gospel by which it is again and again brought to judgment at the foot of

the cross. And the bearer of that judgment may well be and often is man or woman of another faith (cf. Luke 11:31-32). The church is in the world as the place where Jesus, on whom all the fullness of the godhead dwells, is present, but it is not itself that fullness. It is the place where the filling is taking place (Eph. 1:23). It must therefore live always in dialogue with the world, bearing its witness to Christ but always in such a way that it is open to receive the riches of God which belong properly to Christ but have to be brought to him. This dialogue, this life of continuous exchange with the world, means that the church itself is changing. It must change if "all that the Father has" is to be given to it as Christ's own possession (John 16:14-15). It does change. Very obviously the church of the Hellenic world in the fourth century was different from the church which met in the upper room in Jerusalem. **It will continue to change as it meets ever new cultures and lives in faithful dialogue with them.**

6. One may sum up—or at least indicate the direction of—this part of the argument by means of a picture. We have looked at and rejected a series of models which could be expressed in pictures. We will suggest (following Walter Freytag) a simple sketch which may serve to indicate the true basis for dialogue between Christians and those of other faiths.⁶ It will be something like this:



The staircases represent the many ways by which man learns to rise up towards the fulfillment of God's purpose. They include all the ethical and religious achievements which

so richly adorn the cultures of humankind. But in the middle of them is placed a symbol which represents something of a different kind—a historic deed in which God exposed himself in a total vulnerability to all our purposes and in that meeting exposed us as the beloved of God who are, even in our highest religion, the enemies of God. The picture expresses the central paradox of the human situation, that God comes to meet us at the bottom of our stairways, not at the top; that our real ascent towards God's will for us takes us further away from the place where he actually meets us. "I came to call not the righteous, but sinners." Our meeting, therefore, with those of other faiths, takes place at the bottom of the stairway, not at the top. "Christianity" as it develops in history takes on the form of one of those stairways. The Christian also has to come down to the bottom of his stairway to meet the man of another faith. There has to be a *kenosis*, a "self-emptying." The Christian does not meet his partner in dialogue as one who possesses the truth and the holiness of God but as one who bears witness to a truth and holiness which are God's judgment on him and who is ready to hear the judgment spoken through the lips and life of his partner of another faith.

III.

On the basis which has been laid down one can speak briefly of the purpose with which the Christian enters into dialogue with people of other faiths. This purpose can only be obedient witness to Jesus Christ. Any other purpose, any goal which subordinates the honor of Jesus Christ to some purpose derived from another source, is impossible for the Christian. To accept such another purpose would involve a denial of the total lordship of Jesus Christ. A Christian cannot try to evade the accusation that, for him, dialogue is part of his obedient witness to Jesus Christ.

But this does not mean that the purpose of dialogue is to persuade the non-Christian partner to accept the Christianity of the Christian partner. Its purpose is not that Christianity should acquire one more recruit. On the contrary, *obedient* witness to Christ means that whenever we come with another

person (Christian or not) into the presence of the cross, we are prepared to receive judgment and correction, to find that our Christianity hides within its appearance of obedience the reality of disobedience. Each meeting with a non-Christian partner in dialogue therefore puts my own Christianity at risk.

The classic biblical example of this is the meeting of Peter with the Gentile Cornelius at Caesarea. We often speak of this as the conversion of Cornelius, but it was equally the conversion of Peter. In that encounter the Holy Spirit shattered Peter's own deeply cherished image of himself as an obedient member of the household of God. ("No, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean.") It is true that Cornelius was converted, but it is also true that "Christianity" was changed. One decisive step was taken on the long road from the incarnation of the Word of God as a Jew of first-century Palestine to the summing up of *all things* in him.

The purpose of dialogue for the Christian is obedient witness to Jesus Christ, who is not the property of the church but the Lord of the church and of all men and who is glorified as the living Holy Spirit takes all that the Father has given to man—all men of every creed and culture—and declares it to the church as that which belongs to Christ as Lord. In this encounter the church is changed, the world is changed, and Christ is glorified.

NOTES

1. Perhaps the best-known example is J. N. Farquhar, *The Crown of Hinduism* (Madras: Oxford Univ. Press, 1915).
2. *The Missionary Message* (New York: Revell, 1910), p. 247.
3. Jerusalem Report 1, p. 491.
4. Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1966), vol. 5, *Later Writings*, pp. 115-34.
5. Hans Küng, *On Being a Christian* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1976), pp. 99.
6. Walter Freytag, *The Gospel and the Religions* (London: SCM Press, 1957), p. 21.

HUMAN RELIGION

(The Biblical Witness)

- 1. by a Jewish scholar Yehezkel Kaufmann**
- 2. by a German missiologist Karl Hartenstein**
- 3. by a Dutch missiologist Johannes H. Bavinck**
- 4. by an American missiologist Richard R. DeRidder**

/good

Joe Bustillos
MT 533: Theology of Religious Encounter
1/11/85

Essay Review: The Religion of Israel, "The Basic Problem", by Yelezkel Kaufman.

Dr. Kaufman's article flatly challenges the accepted concept regarding the evolution of Israel's religion. On the basis of the religious practices of Ancient Israel's neighbors, scholars have assumed that Judaism underwent a three part evolution from Polytheism to Henotheism to Monotheism. Kaufman roundly criticises these scholars for seemingly ignoring Israel's own self testimony in the Bible.

Based on the Biblical picture given of Idolatry Kaufman concludes that Israel really knew nothing of Paganism. The Biblical picture regards Paganism completely in terms of Fetishism and fails to deal with the question of the actual existence of these living gods. From Micah through the testimony of all the Prophets and the Deuteronomist Paganism is rediculed as "idol" worship, the worshipping of stones and wood.

Kaufman's essay is somewhat of a breath of fresh air in reaffirming the uniqueness of Israel's testimony. While I'm not altogether sure that the Bible's attitude toward Paganism is completely as Monolithic as Kaufman portrays, the insight that he has shared is very welcome.

THE RELIGION OF ISRAEL

by Yehezkel Kaufmann

translated & abridged

by Moshe Greenberg

UNIV. OF CHICAGO
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CHAPTER I

The Basic Problem

If one examines the biblical account of the origins of Israelite monotheism and the story of its battle with and eventual triumph over paganism, he will discover a strange fact: the Bible is utterly unaware of the nature and meaning of pagan religion.

The pre-exilic age was, according to the witness of the Bible, the age of Israelite "idolatry." The people repeatedly backslid and worshiped the "other gods" of the nations round about. Biblical literature is dedicated to fight "idolatry," and biblical law, prophecy, and poetry have all left an abundant record of this generations-long battle. Biblical scholars of all shades of opinion have therefore assumed, as a matter of course, that the biblical age was intimately acquainted with paganism. No one, apparently, has ever doubted this assumption or criticized it in the light of the data. It is taken for granted that the biblical age knew the god-beliefs of the pagans and their myths, for were these not part and parcel of the idolatry of Israel? The war upon idolatry is presumed to have struck at the myths as well; monotheism prevailed as Israel's evolving religious consciousness triumphed over pagan mythological beliefs. The time and manner of this victory are the subject of debate among scholars. But it is agreed on every hand that during the biblical period mythological polytheism was prevalent in Israel as elsewhere and that biblical religion proper came into being only gradually as the product of the great struggle against it.

There is, of course, no question that Israelite religion and paganism are historically related; both are stages in the religious evolution of man. Israelite religion arose at a certain period in history, and it goes without saying that its rise did not take place in a vacuum. The Israelite tribes were heirs to a religious tradition which can only have been polytheistic.

The religion of YHWH could take hold of the people only after overcoming the ancient faith, and the fossil remains of pagan notions that have been preserved in the Bible testify that it was never wholly eradicated. But what was the nature of this upheaval and what do we know of its history? The study of biblical religion hinges on the answer to this question.

Studies of the origin of biblical religion inquire after the extent to which the popular religion, and even the votaries of YHWH at first, recognized the existence of other gods. It is commonly assumed that the religion of YHWH began as henotheism or monolatry, recognizing him as sole legitimate god in Israel, but acknowledging the existence of other national gods. This stage is said to be attested to in the biblical record. The problem is then posed: when did the idea arise that not only was Israel's worship of other gods illegal, but that those gods had no reality whatsoever; i.e., when did henotheism or monolatry become monotheism? *→ implied*

This view is founded on the tacit assumption that the pagan gods were conceived of identically by both Israelite and pagan. The passage from the earlier to the later stage is taken as the repudiation of the pagan idea of the reality of the gods. But what does the Bible itself tell us concerning the Israelite conception of the nature of these gods and the nature of their worship?

The pagan conceives of the gods as powers embodied in nature, or as separate beings connected with nature in some fashion. Deification of cosmic forces provides the soil for the growth of mythology. Popular religion conceives of the gods as persons who inhabit the entire universe and are related in specific ways to each other and to men. They are the heroes of popular myths, the subjects of epic poets; to them temples are built, monuments and images erected. In the cult, material objects usually play an important part, the natural or manufactured object being taken as the bearer of divine power, the dwelling place of deity, or its symbol. While worship of material objects is not an essential feature of paganism, it is its natural outgrowth. Homage is done to the god through the care given to his image. The cult of images is thus intimately bound up with the belief in personal gods, who have specific forms, who inhere in natural phenomena or control them.

The polytheism of the ancient Near East during biblical times was highly developed. Its gods and goddesses appear in literature, art, and culture in fairly standardized forms, which were presumably familiar not only to the clergy but to the laity as well. There are gods of sky and earth, of life, love, and fertility, of death and destruction. The gods have specific roles. There are gods of light and darkness, of thunder and lightning, of wind and rain, of fire and water. Mountains, springs, rivers, and forests have

their gods also. The gods have sexual qualities, the existence of male and female deities being essential to pagan thought. These characteristics serve as the materials for elaborate myths in which the histories and adventures of the gods are related. Theogonies tell of their birth and lineage. Myths tell of their wars, loves, hatreds, and dealings with men. The cult is closely connected with these myths, which are the vital core of priestly and, in a measure, of popular religion.

What would we know of this had we no other source than the Bible?

The Bible knows that the pagans worship national gods, certain of whom are mentioned by name: Baal, Ashtoreth, Chemosh, Milcom, Bel, Nebo, Amon, etc. But it is remarkable that not a single biblical passage hints at the natural or mythological qualities of any of these named gods. Had we only the Bible, we should know nothing of the real nature of the "gods of the nations." In a few isolated passages the pagans are said to worship spirits and demons, but these are anonymous, whereas what we know to have been mythological gods are, in the Bible, mere names. Not a trace remains of the rich store of popular myths associated with these names.

The Bible has a great deal to say about the image cult that was associated with the named gods. But if the god is not understood to be a living, natural power, or a mythological person who dwells in, or is symbolized by, the image, it is evident that the image worship is conceived to be nothing but fetishism.

A few passages permit the inference that the nations worship living gods. Thus in the ancient poem of Numbers 21:29 (cf. Jer. 48:46), Chemosh may be represented as active. Jephthah too speaks of Chemosh as if he gave the land to the Ammonites (Judg. 11:24). Belief in a living god Baal may be alluded to in the story of Judges 6:25-32, telling of Gideon's destruction of his altar. Elijah's taunts also represent Baal, if only mockingly, as a living god (I Kings 18:27). Similarly I Kings 20:28 has the pagans speak of gods of the valleys and of the mountains, if indeed only with reference to the God of Israel. Apart from this we find the notion that later became widespread among Hellenistic Jews (and passed from them to the Christians) that the gods of the nations are spirits or demons (Deut. 32:16 f.; Ps. 106:37). It must be stressed, however, that this is a vaguely generalized conception; no named god of the Bible is so represented. In the above-cited passages the gods of the nations are alluded to not merely as cult objects, but as active beings, whether so in reality or only in the minds of the heathen. Although it is possible that in some a mere personification of idols is intended, there can be no doubt that in a few there is the suggestion that the pagans worship not only idols but gods and spirits as well.

Biblical writers are also aware of the pagans' belief that their idols have

the power to act. The pagans worship and sacrifice to idols hoping to receive benefit and aid from them.

We have now arrived at the limit of the Bible's knowledge of the nature of pagan belief. We find no clear conception of the roles the gods play in nature and in the life of man. No cognizance is taken of their mythological features. The named gods are characterized only by the nations that worship them: "Ashtoreth, god of the Sidonians," "Milcom, the abomination of the Ammonites," "Chemosh, the abomination of Moab," and so forth. No god is ever styled according to his function or place in the pantheon, as so often occurs in the literatures of Egypt, Mesopotamia, and Canaan. Nor is the sexual differentiation of the gods ever alluded to; gods and goddesses are both comprised under the masculine rubric *ʿelōhīm* (e.g., "Ashtoreth, the god of [*ʿelōhā*] the Sidonians"), there being, in fact, no word in biblical Hebrew for "goddess."

Observe now what is said regarding the worship of the "host of heaven." Several of the named gods—Ashtoreth (Ishtar), Bel, Marduk, Nebo, etc.—are known from pagan sources to have been astral deities, yet not once does the Bible connect them with the worship of the "host of heaven." The "host" and the idols (i.e., the name-bearing images) are always treated as two distinct classes of pagan deities. Thus Deuteronomy 4:16–18 first forbids worshiping images of any animal, winged or earthbound, following this (vs. 19) with a separate prohibition of the worship of sun, moon, and host of heaven. Again the sun, moon, and host of heaven are repeatedly listed alongside of—not as identical with—"other gods" (17:3; Jer. 19:13). Thus, too, the "queen of heaven" (Jer. 44:17 f.; apparently, the moon) is never identified in the Bible with Ashtoreth or any other deity that the Bible knows by name. And although Ezekiel sees the elders bowing down "eastward to the sun," he fails to link this solar cult with that of the "idols of Israel" which he saw just before (Ezek. 8:16). Nor does he give any hint that this deified sun bears any of the personal mythological traits of the Assyro-Babylonian Shamash. What the Bible calls the "worship of the host of heaven" it apparently understands to be the cult of the heavenly bodies as such. It knows of no connection between the "host of heaven" and the named gods whose idol-worship it condemns.

The mythological motifs that are found in the Bible are considered evidence of pagan influence on Israelite religion during biblical times. The question here is this: Did Israel, after the rise of the religion of YHWH, take over the myths of the pagans along with their idols? The fact is that the Bible recognizes no mythological motifs as foreign, pagan. In all the legends and allusions with such motifs YHWH is the only active divine

being. There are no active foreign gods. There are allusions to battles that YHWH fought with primeval creatures such as Rahab and his "helpers," the dragon, Leviathan, and the fleeing serpent (Isa. 51:9; Pss. 74:14; 89:11; Job 9:13; 26:12 f.), but these are not considered by the biblical writers as pagan concepts (whatever be their true historical derivation). They belong to Israel's stock of legends, and may well be a legacy of pre-Israelite times. Such creatures appear in Israelite legends—but never Tiamat, Marduk, Hadad, or the like. The myths of the pagans are not even derided as idle tales, as fabrications, nor are they utilized in poetic figures. No foreign god is counted among the enemies of YHWH. Quite remarkable is the fact that precisely in the creation legends (Gen. 1–11), where the bulk of mythological matter is imbedded, paganism is entirely absent; primeval man knows only the god YHWH. In sum, then, there is no evidence that the writers were conscious of any connection between the mythological motifs imbedded in their narratives and the pagan gods.

These phenomena go too deep and are too pervasive to be explained merely as monotheistic reworking. Moreover, while monotheism could not acknowledge the divinity of the pagan gods, it need not have denied them legendary roles. We have seen that occasionally the Bible does allow them the status of demons; these might have been permitted to play the part of evil spirits or enemies of YHWH. A battle with Bel and Nebo as demons is no more damaging to the unity of God than a battle with Rahab or the dragon. Later Judaism saw no harm in stories of God's battles with rebellious angels.

This is not to say that the Bible knows of no battles of YHWH with the "gods of the nations." Indeed, YHWH does battle with them and "work judgments" upon them. But in every case the objects of his fury are the idols, as we shall see. These complementary phenomena can only be explained on the assumption that the biblical age no longer knew pagan mythology.

THE GODS OF THE NATIONS IN THE NARRATIVES

Just as no foreign god is active in the creation stories, so no god other than YHWH ever appears at work in Israel's early history or in the battles between Israel and its neighbors. YHWH fights Israel's enemies, but no god ever appears as his living antagonist; when the Bible tells us of YHWH's battles with foreign gods, it is always idols that are meant.

Thus YHWH "works judgments" on the "gods of Egypt" (Exod. 12:12; Num. 33:4), and similar expressions are to be found elsewhere (e.g.,

(IDOLS) ↔ (NATURAL POWERS)

Isa. 46:1, with regard to Bel and Nebo). In several cases it is not clear whether the reference is to gods or idols, but we may interpret these in the light of unequivocal passages. Jeremiah follows, "I shall punish Bel in Babylon" with, "I shall punish the graven images of Babylon" (Jer. 51:44, 47, 52). Nahum warns Assyria, "I shall cut off idol and molten image from your temple" (1:14). And so does Ezekiel prophesy, "I shall destroy idols and put an end to images in Memphis" (30:13). Jeremiah 50:2, "Bel is shamed, Merodach dismayed," is interpreted by the prophet in the very next clause, "her images are shamed, her idols dismayed." From the total absence of any reference to activity (such as, say, flight, which would be appropriate in these cases), we may conclude that such expressions as "trembling" (Isa. 19:1), or "kneeling" (Isa. 46:1) refer to the movement of idols being cut down and removed from their sites. It is characteristic that instead of fleeing, the pagan gods must be borne away on pack animals, or are carried off into exile with their priests (Isa. 46:1 f.; Jer. 48:7; Dan. 11:8).

The account of the humiliation of the Philistine god Dagon (I Sam. 5), the only detailed story of the "judgments" that YHWH wreaked on a "god of the nations" may serve as a model for all such "judgments." The Philistines captured the ark and set it in the temple of Dagon, "beside Dagon." YHWH's revenge strikes at the people of Ashdod through a vile disease, and Dagon is discovered one morning "fallen on his face before the ark of YHWH." On the morrow, not only is he again fallen, but "Dagon's head and his two hands were cut off and lying on the threshold." The Ashdodites decide to get rid of the ark of the God of Israel "because his hand has lain heavily upon us and our god Dagon." We hear nothing of Dagon proper, Dagon the living god; not even the Philistines are said to suggest that the fall of the image portends evil for the god. They, too, see in their idol's fall and mutilation the "judgment" of YHWH on their god. This is how Israel told of the victories of YHWH over the "gods of the nations."

We should not wonder that the Bible speaks of YHWH's "judging" these idol-gods. The idols are "vanities," it is true, but they are more; they are not religiously neutral, but a source of impurity. Even though it is emphasized over and over again that they are "no-gods," as objects of a magical cult the biblical writers hold them in a measure of awe. The Bible does believe in magic and sorcery, and considers the idols as bearers of occult powers. It is as such that YHWH the God wreaks his judgments upon them.

Two stories illustrate vividly the nature of Israel's battle with idolatry:

the story of the golden calf, in which Israelite idolatry is typified (Exod. 32), and the late story of the image set up by Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. 3), in which the worship of the pagans is portrayed.

When Moses delays his descent from the mountain, the people demand that Aaron "make them a god who will go before them"; the priest makes them a "molten calf." The people make a feast in honor of their manufactured god in which they cry before it, "This is your god, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt" (Exod. 32:1-6). In this portrayal of Israel's prototypal sin we have a classic representation of the biblical view of idolatry. The sin is not that the people represent YHWH in the figure of an ox. The people, having despaired of Moses and the God who brought them out of Egypt, demand that the priest make them a god in place of YHWH (Exod. 32:1, 4, 8; cf. Ps. 106:20 "They exchanged their glory for the image of a grass-eating ox"; Neh. 9:18; cf. also I Kings 12:28; 14:9). They do not give their allegiance to a living god, one of the gods of the nations or of their own ancient pantheon, but to an anonymous image, just now fashioned out of their own trinkets. In this calf, this idol that was not the image of a god, but a god itself, the Bible embodies its conception of Israelite idolatry as fetishism.

In the later story Nebuchadnezzar sets up a huge image in the plain of Dura and orders all his subjects to worship it under penalty of death in a fiery furnace. Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah refuse to obey the king's order; they are thrown into the furnace but are miraculously saved by an angel of God. Nebuchadnezzar, beholding this miracle, does homage to the God of the three youths. Here, again, idolatry is the worship of an anonymous idol, an idol that represents no god at all, but is itself to be worshiped. Thus we see that even as late as Persian and Hellenistic times the Jewish attitude toward paganism was determined by the belief that the pagans worshiped idol-fetishes.

THE POLEMIC AGAINST IDOLATRY

A large part of biblical literature is dedicated to the battle against idolatry, striving to expose its absurdity and discredit it in the eyes of its believers. When this material is examined it appears (a) that the gods, whom the pagans believe to inhabit heaven and earth, are never said to be non-existent; (b) that nowhere is the belief in myths or their telling prohibited; (c) that no biblical writer utilizes mythological motifs in his polemic; (d) that the sole argument advanced against pagan religion is that it is a fetishistic worship of "wood and stone."

The Bible conceives of idolatry as the belief that divine and magical powers inhere in certain natural or man-made objects and that man can activate these powers through fixed rituals. These objects, upon which magical rituals are performed, are "the gods of the nations." The Bible does not conceive the powers as personal beings who dwell in the idols; the idol is not a habitation of the god, it is the god himself. Hence the oft-repeated biblical stigmatization of the pagan gods as "wood and stone," "silver and gold." Hence also its sole polemical argument that idolatry is the senseless deification of wood and stone images. We may, perhaps, say that the Bible sees in paganism only its lowest level, the level of mana-beliefs.

This view finds clear expression in the prophetic polemics against idolatry.

Literary prophecy brought the religion of YHWH to its climax. Chapter upon chapter records denunciations hurled at apostate Israel for their straying after the gods of the nations. If ever there were a struggle with pagan myths and mythological conceptions of deity, we should expect to find its traces here. But we search in vain: not one word have the prophets for mythological beliefs, not once do they repudiate them. Not only do they fail to brand the pagan gods as demons or satyrs, they fail even clearly to deny their existence. In short, the prophets ignore what we know to be authentic paganism. Their whole condemnation revolves around the taunt of fetishism.

Amos, the first known literary prophet, hardly mentions the belief in gods. In 8:14, he speaks of Ashimah of Samaria; in 5:26, he names gods that the Israelites "made" for themselves. Thus the prophet, who is considered by many to have been the first to arrive at pure monotheism, fails entirely to express himself on the nature of the polytheism which he allegedly leaves behind.

In the first three chapters of Hosea the Baal worship of Jezebel's age is reflected, when court circles in Samaria were influenced by the Sidonian queen's imported cult (see below, pp. 368 ff.). Chapter 2 poetically portrays Baal as an illegitimate lover who has displaced YHWH in the affections of "harlot" Israel. But even here none of the distinctive mythological features of the Canaanite Baal are mentioned. Prosperity is a gift of YHWH which Israel has falsely ascribed to Baal (vss. 7-11). In the later chapters 4-14, Baal worship (9:10; 13:1) is but one among several sins of the past, and the manner in which the prophet conceives of Baal is seen clearly enough in 11:2 where "Baals" are parallel with "graven images." Israel is "joined to idols" (4:17), has made a molten calf of silver, "the work of craftsmen" (13:2), not understanding that "the craftsman made it, it is no god!" (8:6). When will Israel be reconciled with its God? When it

says, "Assyria will not save us . . . neither will we say any more 'Our God' to the work of our hands" (14:4). Idolatry is nothing more than the worship of "the work of hands."

It is the same view that we meet with in Isaiah, who speaks of idolatry as the sin of humanity at large. Idolatry entered Israel together with the advent of silver and gold, horses and chariots. As the latter increase, "their land is also full of idols; every one worships the work of his hands, that which his own fingers have made" (2:7 f.). When the Lord humbles man's pride in his final great theophany, "man shall cast away his idols of silver, and his idols of gold, which they made for themselves to worship" (2:20). Isaiah's *Götterdämmerung* is thus the twilight of silver and gold images; he makes no allusion to polytheistic beliefs.

Similarly Micah: On the day of doom all Samaria's "graven images shall be beaten to pieces . . . and all her idols will I lay desolate" (1:7); "And I will cut off your graven images and your pillars out of your midst; and you shall no more worship the work of your hands . . ." (5:12).

Jeremiah speaks of idolatry more than all his predecessors. He mentions anonymous "other gods" (11:10) who are impotent (11:12), whom Israel knew not (19:4); these he represents as the gods of foreign lands (16:13). It has been asserted that Jeremiah acknowledged the existence of other gods, objecting only to their worship in Israel. But Jeremiah amply sets forth his conception of pagan religion: it is the worship of wood and stone (2:27) or the host of heaven (8:2). The "other gods" are not the mythological beings of authentic paganism, nor even demons, but the handiwork of men (1:16), "stone and wood" (3:9), "graven images and strange vanities" (8:19), "no-gods" (2:11; 5:7), and so forth. On the day when the nations repent of the sin of idolatry they will say, "Our fathers inherited naught but lies, vanity and things wherein there is no profit. Shall a man make for himself gods, they being no gods?" (16:19 f.). When men stop worshipping fetishistic "no-gods" idolatry shall come to an end. This conception of pagan religion is expressed most clearly and emphatically in 10:1-16 (cf. 51:15-19). Owing to their resemblance to the viewpoint of the Second Isaiah, these verses have been dated to exilic times. For our purpose, however, the dating is immaterial, inasmuch as all of prophetic literature is unanimous in its conception of idolatry.

In Ezekiel we do find what appears to be an allusion to a foreign pagan myth: the lamenting of Tammuz (8:14; cf. also Zech. 12:11, "the mourning of Hadadrimmon"). Did Ezekiel or his contemporaries know the myth of the death of youthful Tammuz, the beloved of Ishtar? Or did they know only the pagan rites that Ezekiel mentions? The mass of worshipers, even among the pagan nations, had at times only very dim notions of

*power & elemental forces
nature embodied
in an object
or person.*

*Baal is
person.*

the mythological basis of their rites. Did those "weeping women" know the Tammuz myth? Is it certain that they were Israelites, and not rather pagan priestesses of the royal cult (like the imported pagan priests of Jezebel in an earlier age)? It is certain only that Ezekiel (whom Gunkel believes "filled with mythological material") never once argues against pagan mythology. Despite the fact that he polemizes often and heatedly against idolatry, he has not a word to say about the myths of Tammuz or any other god, nor does he ever employ an argument based on a mythological motif. He, too, characterizes pagan religion as fetishism. His favorite epithet for the gods is *gillulim* (dung-pellets); Israel's silver and gold, out of which they "made themselves their abominable images and loathsome things," were their stumbling blocks (7:19 f.). In chapters 16, 20, and 23, the prophet describes Israel's apostasy in detailed visions and allegories; Israel have made "male images" of gold and silver, made offerings to them, even sacrificed to them their sons and daughters. They have adopted the idol-worship of their neighbors throughout their history, from the Egyptian sojourn onward. The imagery is sensual and erotic; the dominant motif is the idol-images, those illegitimate partners of Israel's harlotry, from which the prophet readily passes to the lusty men of the foreign nations—the panoplied soldiery—after whom Israel went a-whoring also. Plastic imagery dominates; in fact, the prophet is so involved with the idols that he ignores the gods entirely. It is most remarkable that Ezekiel, fascinated as he is by erotic symbolism, never once utilizes the sexual themes of mythology. He is silent concerning the strong erotic motif of the Tammuz myths. He uses the awkward image of Israel playing the harlot with stocks and stones, with gold and silver images. But he neglects the mythological store of themes that could have furnished rich material for his imagination. Can it be that Ezekiel knew the myths of the pagans in spite of his failure to employ even one of their motifs in his visions? We are not left to inferences. Ezekiel has himself supplied an epitome of his view of the pagan gods: to the elders of Israel he says, "You say, let us be like the nations, like the families of the countries to serve wood and stone" (20:32). What the pagans worship, then, is nothing but deified wood and stone.

The classic polemics against idolatry found in the Second Isaiah express the biblical conception of pagan worship in its most vivid form. No previous prophet ever arraigned idolatry, ever heaped abuse upon it with such zeal and persistence. And yet, this unremitting attack, this stream of taunts and mockery, plays on one theme only: the monstrous folly of believing that idols can be gods. How much energy and poetic artistry are devoted to prove this single point!

The makers of idols are all of them a mockery, their beloved images are good for nothing. . . .

The workman in wood draws a measuring-line over it, shapes it with a pencil, works it with planes, shapes it with compasses, and makes it into the likeness of a man, with a beauty like that of the human form—to sit in a house!

A man cuts him down a cedar, or takes a plane or an oak, or lays hold of some other tree of the forest. . . . He takes part of it and warms himself, he kindles a fire and bakes bread; then he makes a god and worships it, he molds an image and prostrates himself before it. Half of it he burns in the fire, and on its embers he roasts flesh. . . . And the rest of it he makes into a god—his idol!—prostrates himself before it, worships it, and prays to it, saying, "Save me, for thou art my god!"

They have no knowledge and no intelligence; for their eyes are besmeared so that they cannot see, and their minds are dulled so that they cannot understand. . . . [44:9-18]

Over and over again the prophet ridicules the belief that inanimate objects are gods. Only when the nations perceive that a "block of wood" (vs. 19) is not god will idolatry vanish. This from a man who, so it is alleged, was thoroughly acquainted with the polytheistic religion of his environment and even employed mythological motifs in his writing (51:9). And yet he has not a word about the gods or their myths. It never occurred to him to contrast the sublime God of Israel with the contentious, lustful deities of the pagans and to argue from this contrast that the gods are vanity. If our author had but dipped into the treasury of Babylonian myths, what a mine of material he would have found for his satires: gods who are born and die, who procreate, who eat, drink, and sleep, who make war on their mother, and crowd like flies around the sacrifice. Here was an arsenal which might have armed him to strike at the very heart of paganism: the faith in mythological gods and goddesses and in their dominion over the universe. And yet, in asserting his God's claim, he can say only, "I am YHWH, that is my name, and my glory I shall not give to another, nor my praise to idols" (42:8)—"to idols," not to "a born god," "a dying god," "a lustful god." YHWH evidently has no other rivals beside the idols and the graven images.

IDOLATRY IN THE LAWS

The Pentateuch also represents pagan religion as mere fetishism, and again there is no difference between sources; all agree in their view of idolatry.

There is no law in the Pentateuch interdicting the belief in pagan gods.

or the telling of their myths; in Exodus 23:13, the use of their names in oaths is forbidden (cf. Josh. 23:7). The standing Pentateuchal prohibition concerns the "making" (i.e., the manufacture) of "other gods" and their worship (e.g., Exod. 20:4 f.).

Twice we meet with prohibitions against the worship of beings other than YHWH: the satyrs (Lev. 17:7) and "divine beings" (*ʿēlōhīm*, Exod. 22:19). In both cases, however, foreign gods are not involved, but Israelite demons and divine beings. Whenever foreign gods are mentioned explicitly, it is clear that nothing but idols are meant.

In the Pentateuch, as throughout the Bible, "other gods" include all kinds of images, whether belonging to the cult of YHWH or to pagan cults. Images of the YHWH cult are assumed to be the product of foreign influence, and a cult involving them is regarded as no worship of YHWH at all, but of "other gods" (Exod. 20:3 ff.; Deut. 5:7 ff.). The fetishistic conception is predominant; after banning the worship of Canaanite gods, Exodus 23:24 commands to "demolish them utterly"; Leviticus 19:4 complements "Turn not to the idols" with "nor make for yourselves any molten god." Deuteronomy is particularly illuminating. The two categories of pagan cult objects are the idols and the host of heaven, which God himself has apportioned to the heathen for their worship (4:19; 29:25). The gods of the nations, the "other gods" (6:14 and elsewhere), are unknown to Israel before they learned to worship them from the pagans (11:28; 13:3, 7, 14; 28:64; 29:25). They are "the handiwork of man," "wood and stone" (4:28; 28:36, 64), "silver and gold" (29:16), and the like. The sum total of idolatry is the worship of these fetishes plus the worship of the host of heaven (17:3). Nowhere in all its diatribes does Deuteronomy allude to a belief in living gods and goddesses. What is the folly of idolatry? That its gods "see not, and hear not, and eat not, and smell not" (4:28). It is the same pattern of mockery that we find elsewhere in the Bible (e.g., Pss. 115:4 ff.; 135:15 ff.; Dan. 5:23; Jer. 10:5). Not that they are gluttonous and drunkards—but that they "eat not"! Can we suppose that the biblical authors knew the stories of the banquets of the gods and yet were content with this harmless jeering at the idols alone?

This verdict of the Bible upon pagan religion is too pervasive to be explained as the product of artifice or later editing. Nothing can make plausible the suppression of a polemic against polytheistic beliefs, had such a polemic been in existence.

Does the Bible portray pagan religion as mere fetishism because the writers themselves disbelieved in the gods? If this were so, the writers must have failed in their primary objective, which was to undermine the faith of those who did believe in them. To this end, there was no point in belabor-

ing the fetish-argument to the entire exclusion of the main claim, that the gods were nonexistent. As a matter of fact, it is abundantly clear that the writers naïvely attribute their own viewpoint to the idolaters. The prophets look for the end of idolatry at the time when the idolaters will come to understand that man cannot "make" him gods, and that wood and stone cannot save. When Sennacherib boasts of how he defeated the gods of the nations (II Kings 18:33 ff.; 19:11 f. [Isa. 36:18 ff.; 37:12]), the writer explains, "he cast them into the fire" (II Kings 19:18 [Isa. 37:19]). And Isaiah, too, ascribes this thinking to the Assyrian: "As I did to Samaria and its idols, so shall I do to Jerusalem and its images." The pagan fails to realize that while the gods of the nations are "the handiwork of man, wood and stone," Israel's God is a "living God" (II Kings 19:16, 18 [Isa. 37:17, 19]). There is, of course, no hint that Sennacherib ascribes his triumphs to the god Ashur who triumphed over the gods of these nations.

It may be suggested that the biblical polemic takes this form because, in fact, the mass of people did have this fetishistic concept of the idols, and it was urgently necessary to combat it. Now there was, to be sure, a fetishistic side to paganism: the cult was bound up with an image; the image was, in a sense, the god. This consideration can explain why the fetishistic argument plays an important part in the biblical polemic; it cannot explain, however, the total absence of polemic against the belief in living gods, which was, after all, the root and heart of pagan religion. Greek thinkers in their attacks upon the popular religion gave due attention to its fetishistic aspect, but they did not permit this to distract them from combating the popular myths. Nor did the later Jewish and Christian polemics rest content with the fetishistic argument only. And yet we find that the Bible fails entirely to come to grips with the essence of polytheism—the belief in gods.

Those who have recognized this remarkable peculiarity are too enthralled by the assumption that the biblical writers knew the pagan myths to recognize its significance. The fetishistic argument is said to imply that the biblical writers repudiate the existence of the pagan gods. But where do they? If they meant to say that idols are vain because the gods they represent are nonexistent, why do they persist in arguing that idols are things of naught because wood and stone are of no avail? Why do they conceal the denial of the gods behind the façade of mockery and abuse of images? But the attitude toward the idols is only one aspect of the puzzle. How is the silence of the entire Bible—prophets, narratives, and laws alike—concerning the pagan mythology to be explained? Not only does the Bible fail to deny the existence of the gods, it nowhere repudiates the pagan myths.

In point of fact, as we shall see later, everything in the biblical view of

paganism is strangely distorted. It is entirely ignorant of the close relationship between magic and the gods; it knows nothing of the cosmic-mythological basis of the pagan cult; it has no appreciation of the symbolic value of images.

THE BASIC PROBLEM

It seems incredible that Israel should have been totally unaware of the nature of pagan beliefs. For Israel was always in contact with its pagan neighbors and, moreover, had believing pagans in its midst. Certainly there were circles who knew about paganism more than is reflected in the Bible. What is shown by the fact that the Bible bases its whole polemic on the argument of fetishism is that the chief influence of foreign beliefs on Israelite religion did not involve mythological materials and that the age-long battle of the Bible with idolatry did not involve mythological polytheism. This compels us to examine anew the conventional views regarding foreign influences on Israelite religion during biblical times. Moreover, we shall have to re-examine fundamentally the nature of Israelite "idolatry" during this period.

It is clear now that the question as to the origin of Israelite monotheism has been erroneously formulated. We cannot ask whether it was during the preprophetic or prophetic age that the religion of YHWH came to deny the reality of the foreign gods. The Bible nowhere denies the existence of the gods; it ignores them. In contrast to the philosophic attack on Greek popular religion, and in contrast to the later Jewish and Christian polemics, biblical religion shows no trace of having undertaken deliberately to suppress and repudiate mythology. There is no evidence that the gods and their myths were ever a central issue in the religion of YHWH. And yet this religion is non-mythological. Fossil-remains of ancient myths cannot obscure the basic difference between Israelite religion and paganism. It is precisely this non-mythological aspect that makes it unique in world history; this was the source of its universal appeal.

The Bible's ignorance of the meaning of paganism is at once the basic problem and the most important clue to the understanding of biblical religion. It underscores as nothing else can the gulf that separates biblical religion from paganism. A recognition of this gulf is crucial to the understanding of the faith of the Bible. Not only does it underlie the peculiar biblical misrepresentation of paganism, it is the essential fact of the history of Israelite religion.

good ✓

Joseph Bustillos
MT 533: Theology of Religious Encounter
1/4/85

Essay Review: The Biblical View of Religion, by Karl Hartenstein.

Karl Hartenstein's basic theological presupposition is at least two-fold. The first part is the validity of Christianity (I suppose this should be assumed of all the authors we will be reviewing, but I'm not sure). Hartenstein's second presupposition is that the Bible is a truthful reliable guide to God (his whole essay is bound up in presenting the Biblical point of view, which he assumes to be the truth).¹

His first concern is to restore the unique authoritative Revelation of Christianity to the discussion of religions, and therefore to establish the Biblical record as a normative standard in the treatment of Religion and Pluralism (among both Christians and non-Christians). This really becomes the crux of his whole essay. The Truth begins and ends with Scripture, for Christian and non-Christian. With this in mind, the body of his argument is an analysis of the Biblical terms used to refer to "Religion". His essay deals with the terms "religion", "people of God", "Gentiles", and "Nations". The use (or non-use, in the case of "religion") of these words in the Bible is explored. It becomes clear, according to Hartenstein, that we are dealing with a "Sin/Sinner" tension in dealing with Bible's attitude toward "Religion". In fact, the discussion always seems to be one of some two-fold truth. On one hand we face man as being created in God's image but also horribly marred because of the Fall; God is Seeker and Savior but also Judge; The Nations are in rebellion to God but were created to praise God, etc. His analysis of the Biblical concepts pertinent to our subject become quite involved.

The point of view that he presents is along an entirely different perspective than that of the previous two essays that I have read (Samartha and Forman). While the other two concentrate on the relational aspect of relating to the non-Christian religions, Hartenstein focuses in on the Biblical Truth of the matter. While acknowledging his indebtedness to the Science of Comparative Religious Studies, he is adamant in his feelings that only the Revelation of Jesus Christ can go beyond merely finding similarities and differences in Religion to releasing mankind from the endless cycle of "deep longing and groping . . . towards the holy God, and also his constant running away from His face in blindness and rebellion against God."²

FOOTNOTES

¹ My theological naivety prevents me from verifying Hartenstein's rumored Barthian tendencies. ✓

² p 143.

THE BIBLICAL VIEW OF RELIGION

K. HARTENSTEIN

THE famous chapter four of Kraemer's book deals with the attitude towards the non-Christian religions. We shall limit ourselves to dealing with this chapter only. He shows three fundamental issues in wrestling with this problem. The non-Christian religions, he says, are not a sum total of separate ideas, but are all-inclusive systems of life, rooted in a religious centre, at the same time embracing a system of culture and a structure of society and state. Further, he says that 'Christ is the crisis' of all religions, of the non-Christians as well as of empirical Christianity. We have to study these religions in the light of the Revelation of Christ. Therefore—and this is his third point—the missionary attitude excludes all feeling of superiority because to be a Christian means always to be a forgiven sinner and to feel in joint liability with all members of non-Christian religions, as well as to stand very firmly and steadfastly for the only and whole truth of Christ in whom God has disclosed and revealed Himself as the Way, the Truth and the Life. The missionary attitude is therefore 'a combination of downright intrepidity and of radical humility.' But he deepens the problem in making it clear that the members of the non-Christian religions are human beings created in the divine image and corrupted

by sin, men in a state of fundamental disharmony, as are all men on earth, according to 'biblical realism.' And therefore he defines his special task in dealing with non-Christian religions as being 'in the light of the Christian Revelation to lay bare the dialectical condition, not only of the non-Christian religions, but of all the human attempts towards comprehension of the totality of existence' (p. 125). This, he says, is the great and important function of what in dogmatics is called, 'General Revelation' or 'Natural Theology.' He has derived his thesis from the Bible, but, as he says, he was unable for lack of space to give detailed references. This essay tries to meet this deficiency and to support and to underline what Kraemer has said with regard to this point, drawing upon the whole of the Holy Scriptures. What is the attitude of the Bible in dealing with the non-Christian religions in the light of the revelation of God in Christ?

The Usage of Language in the Bible

1. It is very important to note that the Bible entirely lacks the term 'religion.' This word has its special story. It is very often used in the sense of piety by Cicero in *De natura deorum* and has been transferred from this Latin use into the catholic ecclesiastical language, i.e. by Lactantius and Augustine. Here 'religion' means that people are tied to the highest reality by Creation, or that God has bound up men to Himself, that they may serve Him and obey Him. In the later stages of the Catholic Church the word *religio* and *religiosus* has come to mean the special spiritual life of the monk. To climb up to the high commandments of the Church is impossible for the ordinary man. The monk alone is

(Tried to highest reality -
monasticism?)

Religion

↓
"Faith and Faith
in Christ"
(Reformation)

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THE AUTHORITY OF THE FAITH

able to live a religious life, to realise a spiritual existence. The Reformation totally changed the meaning of the words, because Luther destroyed the idea that the life in the monastery is on a higher level of Christian realisation and a guarantee of salvation. He uses the biblical term 'faith, true faith in Christ.' And the Church is the body of people who truly believe in Him. *Religio* means only the whole of Christian doctrine and life. He uses *religio Christiana* as *religio vera* versus all *religiones falsae*, the Christian religion in which he believed as well as the Roman Catholic religion. *Religio* is used to express the whole of the outward form of a Christian life in faith and truth. And if he uses the term *religio Christiana*, he thinks that this *religio* is the only true one because it is *religio Dei*, i.e. the religion whose content is the Revelation of God in Christ. The term 'revelation' as well as the term 'faith' are much more emphasised by him. It was the period of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries which finally determined the meaning of *religio* and 'religion' as we use that word to-day. This was a period of active opposition and revolt against orthodoxy and confessional barriers. The thought of the day ran very distinctly in terms of a common religious attitude and consciousness which is shared by all mankind. Christianity is only a special manifestation of human religion. Christianity is nothing essentially different from the other religions, though it may be the highest form or the deepest fulfilment of the common religious values of the world. So it is quite clear that this word has in itself a meaning which inclines to lower the character of the truth of the biblical message, and to smooth down the fact of revelation, a fact which, we

↓
religious attitudes
"relativism"

THE BIBLICAL VIEW OF RELIGION

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hold, can in no way be compared with religious manifestations in the other religions. According to biblical realism the revelation of God in Christ is the only fact by which the true God has revealed Himself truly, by which therefore all religions have to be tested and examined. Kraemer's book is the great attempt to rediscover the biblical attitude of 'Revelation' versus 'religion', and to go back behind many centuries to the original attitude of the Reformation, to the reality of Jesus Christ, who is the crisis of all human religions. But to take a step so bold as this, a deep foundation is needed. We have to try to lay bare the fundamental attitude of the biblical writers about the relation between God's self-disclosing actions and the world of religions.

2. If the Bible fails to use this word so commonly used in theology and church life, what are the terms the Bible uses for these problems? The Old Testament speaks in its first chapters only about Man as the creation of God in His own image, but at once separated and alienated from his Creator by sin. The first chapters of the Bible speak therefore about Adam as the type of human nature in its fundamental disharmony, being God's creation and at the same time corrupted by sin and constantly prone to assert his self-centred and disordered will against God. These chapters speak in the common sense of men as a whole. In Genesis x. 5 the term 'Gentiles' is used, emphasising the fact that God has not created a uniform mass of human beings, but a lot of characteristic types of nations, 'divided in their lands.' But from the twelfth chapter on throughout the Old Testament there is a very distinct difference between *am* and *goyim*, in German *Volk* and *Völker*, in

restore Revelation to
religion

man, creation
rebellion

↓
many peoples

↓
own nations

English 'people' and 'nations' or 'gentiles' or 'heathen.' As substitute for *goyyim* we have also *leom* which is translated by 'nation' and 'people,' and the word *umma* which is also translated by 'nation' and 'people.' What does this mean?

God has elected out of the nations one nation, His nation, His people, and has transferred unto Israel the mystery of His holy will, law and eternal promise. He has started His *kahal*, His assembly, His 'congregation' as the English Bible says, into which He has implanted His holy word by the fathers and the prophets. Beyond this assembly of God, His people, there are the vast multitudes of nations, gentiles and heathen, what we would call to-day the world of non-Christian religions. Now it is very interesting that the English Bible translation uses for *am*, as applied to Israel, almost exclusively 'people,' a very vague and common word (people 1835 times and nations only 17 times, twice folk), surely in the sense of 'people of God.' For *goyyim* the English Bible translation uses nations (373 times), heathen (142 times), gentiles (30 times) and people (11 times). We shall deal only with the words nation, heathen and gentiles.

The world of human beings is, according to the biblical realism, a world of nations, of types characterised by language, history, blood and race. But at the same time these nations are gentiles or heathen, terms which clearly state that these nations have a religious centre and that this centre is based upon religious facts outside the assembly of God, beyond the limits of God's people. It is a very remarkable fact that the Bible speaks about the world of religions, of the *goyyim*, in this double

↓
one nation
nations / people
gentiles

2

sense as nations and heathen simultaneously. The New Testament is clearer and simpler in its use of terms. For *am* it has, according to the Septuagint, *laos* which is afterwards used for the Christian *ekklesia*. It is translated by the term 'people' only. The term *goyyim* in the New Testament is also according to Septuagint translated by *ethne* which is translated by the term gentiles (93 times) and nations (64 times). The term 'heathen' is only used five times and disappears more or less entirely in the New Testament.

To sum up: The Bible does not use the term 'religion,' but on the one hand 'people of God,' on the other hand, 'nations' and 'gentiles,' and we have to think over the meaning of this.

Interpretation of Religion in the Bible.

1. If we deal with the problem of religion in the Bible, we must quite clearly and frankly admit that we have left aside the base of comparative religion, of what we call the scientific interpretation of this problem. To leave it aside means in no way to despise it, in spite of many wrong views which have entered by this branch of science into Christian theology. The science of comparative religion has, and here we fully agree with Kraemer (p. 108), fostered a spirit of fairness and honesty towards non-Christian religions, and has undermined all superiority feeling about our own religion. It has opened our eyes to the stagnation and petrification of our own spiritual life as well as to the common religious consciousness of men. We have gained a much clearer idea of our own religion as having much in common with others, and have seen on the other side the religions of

people outside of God's people?

① Leave the sciences open the Bible.

the world in their deep experiences and high aspirations. It has helped therefore to a clear theological self-criticism and repentance, and to differentiate quite clearly between the human structure of the Christian religion on the one side and on the other its uniqueness and the incomparable content of God's revelation in Christ.

But in getting rid of this base of the science of comparative religion, we try to restore and rebuild the original attitude of biblical realism. We are thankful for the service which science has rendered to us, but we must try to rediscover how the Bible deals with this question in order to gain a clear theological point of view, obedient to the message of the Bible to see and to judge, to understand and to criticise the world of religions in the light of the revelation of God. What we desperately need for mission and Church is an evangelical study of religions, a theological view of the history of religions. Very little has been done in the realm of theology, and our great scholars have left us without answer and help in regard to this problem. We have to find our way anew to support and to undergird what Kraemer has seen in a very clear and inspired vision.

2. How does the Bible regard men? The first chapter of the Bible shows us the project and design of creation. God, the Sovereign and Lord, has created the world and man by His almighty word and powerful act. God is the Lord and Creator, man is the creation, created by God as a responsible being to listen to Him and to obey His law, to make his decisions in freedom for God. Therefore St Paul is right in telling us that God has made Himself manifest and shown His glory by the creation of man and even in his conscience (Rom. i. 19-20). He

is manifest in His work. He has not left Himself without witness. The universe has been created to praise God and to glorify His Godhead.

But this fundamental project and design has been thoroughly destroyed from the side of men. Man has made himself autonomous and dispensed with the order of obedience and humility. He wanted to be his own lord, to 'be as God' (Gen. iii.). This fundamental act of revolution and rebellion against God has broken the primal order of the creation. Now the relation between man and man, between brother and brother is destroyed (Gen. iv.). The relation between man and woman has become the dark place of passion and despair (Gen. iii. iv. ff.). The barrier between the human world and the realm of the spirits has been broken and the bad spirits have entered; have even intermingled with human beings (Gen. vi.). And therefore the order of the Kingdom of God and the kingdoms of the world have been crushed down, because humanity wanted to make itself a name and to build a city and a tower, 'whose top may reach unto heaven' (Gen. xi.). We have to understand these very old stories in their symbolic language as basic facts of what we would call heathenism, man's own religion, human beings' own attempt to grasp the totality of life, to build up a culture without God, to erect a world by its own physical and spiritual power. This sinful rebellion of the creation against the Creator is the fundamental fact upon which the whole world of human religion has been built up. Religion in the sense of biblical realism means the deification of man and therefore the humanisation of God. The 'ego' of the creature has asserted itself against the holy will of God and has

Autonomy + rebellion Gen 3

Adam + Eve

the sons of God & the daughters of men

kingdom building

Religion - to fill the void left by human rebellion - exalt man - humanize God.

the empirical sciences which can analyze & compare & set the subject on an understandable footing cannot tell us about "unique revelation"

Natural Revelation: man is created in image of God.

freed itself from the bonds of the freedom into which it has been created. The effect of this basic fact has ended in the slavery of man to the spirits and demons, to sin and death. That is the comprehensive view of the Bible with regard to humanity, that behind all men's thoughts and decisions there lies an initial decision against their Lord, the religious revolution against the holy God. Therefore St Paul is quite right in saying that 'when they say, God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful . . . but have worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator' (Rom. i. 21-25). And the effects are that men became fools, 'changed the glory of God into an image made like the corruptible man, and to birds and four-footed beasts and creeping things,' filled with all unrighteousness and wickedness, 'haters of God.' Therefore the whole religious world is under God's punishment and judgment, under the power of sin and death. All the world has become guilty before God.

But that is only one side of the case. On the other side Genesis ix. shows that God has not definitely destroyed human nature, but has established His Covenant with every living creature. He has revealed His patience with man, waiting again and again 'that they should seek the Lord' (Acts xvii. 27), for in Him, the Creator, in the future as in the past, 'they live and move and have their being' (Acts xvii. 28). He did not cease to be and to remain their God and has again and again withheld His judgment until the day came when God's own and only image, His holy Son, entered the world and died as the Crucified for their religious sin, re-establishing the Kingdom of God on earth, rebuilding the primal

God's response:
He calls a people
to himself
God-seeker

orders of obedience and love, of humility and faith. But also with regard to men the Bible shows quite clearly that they know that there is a God, that they seek His face, that they erect an altar for the unknown God, confessing that they do not know *who* God really is. The groping of man towards God is therefore simultaneously an acknowledgment and a denial of Him. 'Why do they seek the God who has made Himself manifest to them?' (Acts xvii. ; Rom. ii. 1 ; 1 Cor. i. 21-24). 'The whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now' (Rom. viii. 22), showing by this that they know they have left the true God and are driven again and again to go back to seek Him, to discover Him anew. They suffer from their trespasses and through fear of death are 'all their lifetime subject to bondage' (Heb. ii. 15).

To sum up: The Bible expresses quite clearly a dialectical attitude of God towards men. They are His creatures and He remains their Lord in patience and mercy. But on the other hand His wrath is revealed upon them because of their rebellion against their Lord, and it is only the fact of the crucified Son of God, where the free love and abundant mercy of God break through His wrath and judgment, that saves humanity. And on the other side the Bible expresses a clear dialectical attitude with regard to men. Men are God's creatures and remain in this state. But they have left the primal orders into which they are called and have tried to deify their own creation, to become as God. So they try to flee away from God and yet they are powerless to leave Him, and they feel bound to seek and to go back to their original status. They make their own images, denying

Awareness =
denial
"If you know
why didn't
you act?"

God
creator/savior
judge

God
rebel
seek
original world

the manifestation of God rendered unto them. They glorify the world, the blood, themselves, serving themselves as God. But this very phrase 'as God' shows their original knowledge of God, that they are unable to get rid of Him by whom they were created. Therefore the Bible describes man as in a state of conflict, tension and disharmony. To be man means to be in disharmony with God and with oneself. So men are always running away from God and in the same moment driven back to Him, their original home and holy order. That is the fundamental biblical view of humanity, or rather of the religious position of humanity before God.

3. We have spoken thus far only of God and man, of the situation of men before God. And now we have to face the problem why the Bible speaks so plainly about nations, gentiles and heathen with regard to humanity. We shall try to make it clear.

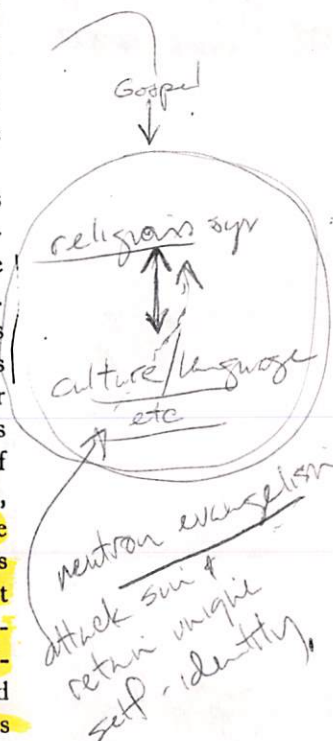
(a) It is absolutely wrong to think in the terms of the old orthodoxy which has always tried to speak about Christianity as the source of light, about the religions as the world of darkness. The problem is much more complicated. Why are human beings called nations? Why are the gentiles and heathen called nations? I think there are three reasons. First: God has not created a uniform mass, but nations, types characterised by distinct, special and different languages, culture, history, blood and race. The message of the revelation of St John shows that these nations, kindreds, people and tongues (Rev. vii. 9) have a special meaning, perhaps importance also, for God's purpose with the world. God willed that there should be nations, and not undifferentiated human beings. We have to take this fact very

seriously in dealing with the peoples of the earth in our mission work. Each has its own distinctive language, its peculiar attitude towards soil and home. There are laws and customs, characteristic *völkische Ordnungen* as we call them in German. It would be futile to think that christianisation means denationalisation, a serious mistake that has often been made in the past. What God has created in His richness and comprehensive might we have to acknowledge, and to sow the seed of the word into the very soil of the particular nation to which we are called.

(b) The fact that the Bible speaks about nations shows us that, as Kraemer has clearly proved, non-Christian religions have produced a comprehensive system of culture and civilisation, of state and order. It is a very superficial view if we think about religions only in terms of ideas, values and cults. These gentiles are nations. Their life revolves round a particular centre of religious facts and basic truth. But out of this centre there has been developed a whole system of thoughts and customs, of culture, civilisation, language, art, a whole structure of life and existence. That is the reason why mission work means the impact of God's message not on an individual religious being only, not even on a system of ideas, but on a nation, on a comprehensive reality, on a whole which, if it is really influenced by the Christian message, will be permeated through and through by this message without losing its characteristic type of peculiar nationality, philosophy and culture.

(c) The fact that the Bible speaks about nations, that gentiles are also called nations, shows us that we

unique ethnicity



God created
nation peoples tribes
(not undifferentiated
human beings)

have to look upon these people not only as prodigal sons, but as human beings who are closely related to us, who exist together with us as God's creatures. They are men as we are men. The Bible asks us to look upon them as human beings who laugh and weep, who love and hate, who live and die, who sin and think for tomorrow like ourselves. All true approach towards non-Christian religions means to approach nations, means to approach human beings like ourselves, under the same promise, which all share who bear a human face.

We think that it is of the highest importance to realise that the Bible speaks about nations in speaking about gentiles and heathen.

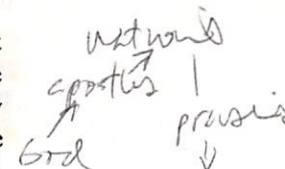
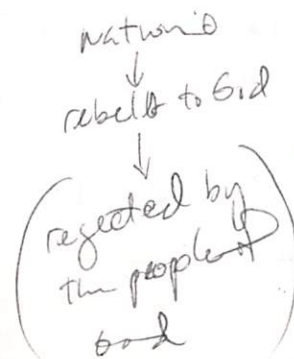
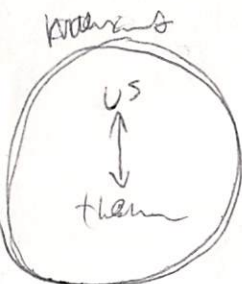
4. But let us take the other side of the problem. The Bible speaks about gentiles and heathen in speaking about nations. There are two lines of thought in the Bible in dealing with this side of the problem. The gentiles have soiled and contaminated themselves with bad customs. They did not remain under God's ordinances. They served images and idols. They know nothing of God's law. They rebel and rage against the Lord. They wear that covering cast over all people, the veil that is spread over all nations (Isa. xxv. 7). They use vain repetitions and seek all worldly things. They need to be illuminated because they walk in darkness and in their own ways. They have not the law of God and are without Christ, aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, strangers without hope, without God in the world. Therefore God is their judge, His wrath and punishment is revealed upon them. The people of God is called to expel them and not to join them in any way. They are a temptation for the assembly of God and it is ex-

horted to dispense with them, not to have any intercourse with them and no agreement with idols.

But there is a second line, when the Bible speaks about the nations as gentiles and heathen. It is the message of the psalms, the prophets and the apostles. They are called to praise God and to glorify Him, because He is their Lord, 'the God of the gentiles also' (Rom. iii. 29). They are the object of God's mercy, and the apostles and prophets are called to proclaim His message to them. They repent and turn again to the law of faith. They turn to the true God who has sent to them His salvation. The obedience to the faith shall be proclaimed among all nations and the time shall come when the fulness of the gentiles will come into God's folk (Rom. xi. 25). The prophet John sees in his beautiful vision a great multitude, which no man could number, among all nations and people standing before the Throne and the Lamb. Gentiles and heathen are human beings under the great promise that God will approach and seek them with the only purpose to save them and to share with them abundant salvation.

This twofold biblical view shows quite clearly the twofold situation of human beings as creatures of God and rebels against God. It is very remarkable that the Bible is as explicit in condemning heathenism and showing it as a revolution against God, as in treating the heathen as human beings under God's patience and promise, waiting for the hour that Christ will enter into their house to seek and to save the lost.

To sum up: The problem of gentiles and nations is a special aspect of what the Bible tells us about the relation of God towards men. And we cannot under-



stand what the Bible says about nations and gentiles without thinking at the same time of what it says about the situation of men before God. The approach of the Gospel to the non-Christian religions is a special example of the approach of the Gospel to humanity, to the world as a whole. If we understand the purpose of God with His creation we are able to understand the special problem of the attitude of God towards nations and gentiles, towards the non-Christian religions.

5. We shall try to make the problem clearer in dealing with the question of God and gods in the Bible, in order to understand the deeper meaning of the first commandment, 'I am the Lord Thy God. Thou shalt have no other gods before me.' The Old Testament makes a clear distinction between images and idols on the one side, the gods of the gentiles on the other side. Images and idols are called *elilim* which means 'of no value.' These things are the work of the hands of men and therefore pass away without eternal quality. It is very remarkable how the prophets Isaiah, Ezekiel, Habakkuk and others mock and deride all who worship idols and images.

It is another thing with the gods of the gentiles. The Old Testament speaks about the true living God as the Lord of the Hosts. He is higher than heaven and earth, the Creator of the whole, and all His works are made to stand at His disposal, to obey and to praise Him (psalms and prophets). At the same time He is the judge of the corrupted creation and He will come to destroy all powers on earth and in heaven which have opposed Him in the times of the world. Therefore God is called very often 'God of gods' (Deut. x. 17, parallels).



This term points out the fact that His creatures—sun, moon, stars and all the host of heaven—are worshipped by the gentiles as gods, in the same way as the non-Israelitic deities are called gods, like Baal, Ashera, Moloch and others. The gods of the gentiles are powers with limited reality, because they are God's creatures. They have some power in themselves, but they are not true gods, they are, as St Paul says, the elements of the world (Gal. iv.). The gentiles worship also beasts and men, demons and fallen angels. It is very remarkable that the New Testament especially prohibits very strongly the worship of these fallen angels (Col. ii.; 2 Cor. xi.), because it knows that behind all these powers there stands Satan, who has his own angels and powers, his *exousiai* as the New Testament says. 'Jesus Christ has come that He might destroy the work of the Devil' (1 Cor. iii. 8). The gods of the gentiles are demons, bad and diabolic spirits. They have a limited reality, they are something, but they do not share the power of God Almighty. Therefore St Paul says on the one side that these gods are nothing, but on the other side he says that they are something, 'called gods as there be gods many, and lords many—but there is but one God' (1 Cor. viii. 5-6). The gentiles in worshipping these idols and gods are under the holy God's punishment and curse which can only be abolished through the coming of God's living Son Himself.

From these facts we have to learn that the Bible utterly condemns all worship of idols which have no reality at all in them, but in the same moment condemns all worship of gods which are something, but are creatures of God like sun, moon, stars, like wind, thunder and

earth, like stones, mountains and trees. And third, the Bible condemns very strongly the worshipping of all the bad spirits, this chaotic multitude of superhuman beings which have had their power from the beginning, since men have separated themselves from the true God, existing and working in the occult world between God's Kingdom and the world of men. **There is only one way to overcome all these mighty powers of the corrupted creation, that is the victory of the Lord Jesus Christ.** He alone redeems men from the domination of these transitory powers and reconciles the world with Himself. He has become the victor over all these spirits, fallen angels and demons and has subdued them under His holy power. He has taken their power from them and pressed them to serve Him alone until His day comes on which they will have lost all their mighty power in heaven and earth.

It is very important to see that nations or gentiles have fallen into the hands of the false gods, worshipping creatures, abandoning and fleeing before the one true God who is the Creator of all. Therefore the whole missionary task is nothing else than to proclaim the victorious message of Christ as the Lord of all and the mighty impact upon this whole transitory world of unclean and untrue spirits. All true mission work is a kind of exorcism through the powerful and victorious word of Christ.

We may sum up: The biblical view of religion is only a special view of the relation between the holy God as the Creator and the Redeemer of the world, and the world in its utterly disharmonious situation, as His creation but corrupted by sin. And the deepest sin, the sin of all

sins, is the religious one by which men have created their own creation and idols, worshipping the false and untrue gods, fleeing and seeking simultaneously the face of the true God. Therefore we have to speak, with regard to our problem, in the common categories of God and world, of Lord and man. But there is a special situation because God did not create a uniform mankind but multitudes of nations, each one with its peculiar character as a special type of the whole. And these nations are at the same time called gentiles or heathen because they have misused their existence as nations and have become religious bodies, each nation worshipping its special gods, spirits and idols, forming thus a multitude of religious deformations and caricatures, developing a whole system of worship and doctrine under the sway of superhuman powers, to overcome which God has sent His Son. In the light of the Revelation all these religious types are utterly wrong, but they show both 'la misère et la grandeur de l'homme,' **the deep longing and groping of human soul towards the holy God, and also his constant running away from His face in blindness and rebellion against God.** Therefore Emil Brunner is quite right in saying that the history of religions proves that man cannot dispense with God, but is compelled to come back again and again to Him, for whom he is groping and longing, but that he has lost the only one who is the true God. Therefore the worst idol bears witness to something of the mystery of the holy God who has created all nations. But in the same sense the history of religions is, as Calvin says, a continual fabrication of gods and idols, is the history of 'idolology' in which men are extremely busy to deify the world and themselves and



Jesus Christ liberates from that

God: redeeming

[sin: rebel God of religion system]

How do we know?

rebellion (not ok)
no God
ingenuity (ok)
misuse

→ God
rebellion
religion

to belittle God and His world. Again Emil Brunner says that every god bears the face of the godless 'ego' of man projected into the world of absolute values. This twofold view of the Bible about the gentiles corresponds exactly with the twofold explanation of the Bible about man who is revealed in the light of the Bible in his utmost disharmony.

These last sentences lead us to the very practical question how the missionary ought to deal with non-Christian religions, with the whole world of heathenism. We fully agree with Kraemer in his fundamental saying that every missionary needs the twofold attitude of downright intrepidity and radical humility, or as he says (p. 129): 'The relation of the Christian Church to the world is the combination of a prophetic, apostolic heraldship of truth for Christ's sake with a priestly, apostolic ambassadorship of love for His sake.' We shall try to explain these sentences a little more.

Two ways of dealing with the non-Christian religions are blocked for a true missionary. The first we would call the aggressive way of superiority, the second we may call the sympathetic approach to non-Christian religions. The first is wrong because it forgets that the missionary himself is a saved sinner called out by the word of God from that very world of gentiles from which we all come. And on the other hand it forgets that the missionary deals with a world which has remained God's Creation, with men and women who have lost their divine origin, but still are looked upon by God as His prodigal sons. The second way is impossible for us because it forgets that the missionary is the bearer

of the absolute message of Salvation, presenting the one Truth of the redeeming love of God in Christ. Therefore we need a new, a third way in our approach to the non-Christian religions, the biblical one, saturated with the fulness of biblical views. We may try to describe this third way by three aspects.

(a) The biblical way to approach non-Christian religions is the way of true translation. We are called to transfer the message of Christ into the very world of the non-Christian religions. For that purpose the missionary needs a thorough knowledge of the language, of the religious ideas, of the totality of life and existence of the gentiles. He has to try to come as near as possible to this world by the way of utmost humility and self-denial, by patience and love, by learning and listening to the deepest needs of men. This way is the contrary of all ways of wrong religious superiority and security. It is always being forgotten that even the missionary is only the instrument in the hands of God, a saved sinner, privileged by God's mercy to continue the work of Christ.

(b) The second aspect of this biblical way of approach we would call the way of a sincere and human attitude towards the others. As we have seen above we take the gentiles so seriously that we look upon them as our fellow men, as men like ourselves, who share with us, between birth and death, all human thoughts and experiences, all human actions and sufferings. We need an extreme measure of patience, love and compassion towards these people, even in the most trivial things of their life. A missionary needs continual study of the thirteenth chapter of the First Epistle of St Paul

to the Corinthians, where he speaks of just this charity which is the only attitude towards a lost world.

(c) And the third aspect of biblical approach we would call the way of radical decision. 'We are bold enough,' says the group at Tambaram, 'to call men out from [other religions] to the feet of Christ.'¹ What does this mean? Nothing else than to transfer the sentence of death to the religious world, a comprehensive call to get rid of the whole world of the religious thinking and acting of the gentiles, a message to leave the burning house of the ancestors, an uncompromising 'No' to the totality of their former existence. It is only possible to describe this fact by the symbol of life and death, because Jesus Christ has really died for the world and has really overcome Death by His Resurrection, that we may share with all others this way of Christ, this way of radical decision. But also here it is most important to note that the missionary ought to be an incarnation of humility, a humble student of this unknown world of non-Christian religions without losing a single point of the comprehensive new and radical message he has to present to this world. This biblical way of approach is therefore a very dangerous one. The life of a missionary is a perilous life. He is always in danger of losing his way on the right hand by getting a superiority feeling towards the others, and to lose his way on the left hand by getting an inferiority complex in regard to his message, identifying himself with the highest religious values of the gentiles. To escape both dangers the missionary needs the leading and protecting hand of Christ for every step of his way, to approach this lost world with downright intrepidity

¹ See pp. 200, 210.

with regard to his message, and with radical humility with regard to his personality. To proclaim truth in humility, that is the central task and the lifelong work of a man who is called to be an ambassador of Christ.

Joseph Bustillos
MT 533: Theology of Religious Encounter
January 18, 1985

excellent
perceptive

Essay Review: Human Religion in God's Eyes, A Study of Romans 1:18-32, by J.H. Bavinck.

From the title one might easily guess Dr. Bavinck's bias towards the Bible (and against "Human Religion"). Something that's bothering me about these essays is that the authors are all lining up various proof-texts against the non-Christian religions and firing them off like so much artillery from a Battleship (as with most modern naval battles opposing forces never actually "see" each other, they just get each others bearings and fire away). It's not that Romans chapter one doesn't apply or shed light on the subject. It just doesn't seem to get beyond telling me things I already know. I know what the Bible says about "non-Christian" religions but I'm still not sure about what to say to the individual that asks, "What do you think of our religion?"

Bavinck would have me say that one's religion is an unconscious attempt to block out one's inherent God-consciousness. He does give Buddha and Mohammad the benefit of the doubt by writing that their religious experiences were genuine but then the resulting religious faiths were "the result of human repression and substitution." (324).

The history of religion contains a dramatic element. It includes divine approach and human rejection, rejection hidden by the appearance of man's concern with God. But the god whom man seeks is different from the true God because the uncanny process of repression and exchange has been at work. (324)

That pretty much bottles it all up. Anything that even looks to be a sincere searching for God is just a clever disguise for one that is actually running away from God. All this with some psychological terminology thrown in about "Repression" and "unconscious impulses;" Some where along the way I lost sight of Paul and the first chapter to his letter to the first century Romans.

Actually through all of this Bavinck is forcing me to see at least two things. 1) Each individual must make a choice for the Gospel, and any non-choice is a rejection of God's on-going self-disclosure (general/special/half-price/etc. revelation). And 2) upon receiving salvation each individual becomes aware of that on-going self-disclosure that was going on before they "knew" God, but could only be fully "known" upon receiving the gospel. That much I liked in Bavinck's essay.

HUMAN RELIGION IN GOD'S EYES

A Study of Romans 1:18-32

By J. H. Bavinck

One of the most important questions every missionary has to face when he approaches his work is how to regard the non-Christian religions he will encounter. From time to time he will be asked 'What do you think of our religion?', and he will ask himself whether it is possible to use elements in another religion as stepping-stones or as points of contact in evangelism. In many countries, especially in Eastern Asia, he will meet people who think that all religions are in the deepest sense identical. When I was in Java, a taxi-driver, a serious Mohammedan, expressed himself in just this way: 'Well, Sir, there are various cars in the world, very small ones and big American ones, Volkswagens and Cadillacs and others. All of them can take you where you want to go, but some are much more comfortable than others!' And he always added 'Your religion is not very comfortable'. That was his conviction. It is clearly a very important problem of great significance for our whole approach to the presentation of the Gospel.

In the first chapter of Romans, St. Paul goes very deeply into this whole problem and says things of the greatest value for every missionary. We may start at verse 19: 'For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse; for although they knew God they did not honour him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking and their

senseless minds were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man or birds or animals or reptiles. Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonouring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed for ever! Amen. For this reason God gave them up to dishonourable passions . . . And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a base mind and to improper conduct.'

First Paul stresses the fact that there exists a more or less general revelation: 'what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them'. In this revelation God is speaking to every man, to every people in the world.

From there Paul reaches the conclusion that 'the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of men who by their wickedness suppress the truth'. The New English Bible rendering is worth noting: 'For we see divine retribution revealed from heaven and falling upon all the godless wickedness of men. In their wickedness they are stifling the truth'. Several points deserve our attention. In the first place Paul clearly says that God is already dealing in judgement with men in this world, and that He returns their wickedness on their own heads. He returns to this point several times later on. It is quite

Repressing
God's truth

astonishing that in this chapter he says as many as three times 'God gave them up... God gave them up... God gave them up'. To what? To their own desires, to their own sinful trains of thought and course of life. That is the divine retribution. Sin punishes itself, as it were.

The second point concerns the apostle's words on the struggle of men with the truth of God. St. Paul uses the word *katecho*, lit. 'to keep down'. The RSV renders it 'suppress', and the New English Bible 'stifle'. We could well translate it by the word 'repress'. I deliberately choose a word which has a technical meaning in the literature of psychology. Psychologists describe the activity of repression as follows: 'Repression is the process by which unacceptable desires or impulses are excluded from consciousness and thus, being denied direct satisfaction, are left to operate in the unconscious.' What Paul is speaking of here can thus be easily translated by that word 'repression'. Of course the word has a much wider meaning than it usually carries in modern psychology. Freudian psychology applies it specially to 'unconscious desires having a more or less sexual nature.' In more recent psychology it also refers to desires and impulses of a very different nature. The impulses or impressions which are repressed may be very valuable ones; anything contrary to the pattern of life or the dominating tendencies of thinking or speaking may be repressed in the human soul. Usually this happens unconsciously. Man himself does not know that he is doing it. But it happens with surprising strength and consequences.

We may justifiably interpret Paul's words here in terms of this powerful activity brought to light by the psychology of our day. He says that man always represses God's truth because it is contrary to the whole pattern of his life. Man's wickedness prevents this truth really reaching him; it has no chance to reach him, it is automatically repressed into the background of his consciousness.

In v. 19 Paul goes on to say that 'what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them'. The words 'plain to them' cannot mean that man *really* sees and understands. In the New English Bible these words are rendered 'lies plain before their eyes'. That seems more correct. A man's actual seeing is another story. As Paul goes on to make clear, man always resists and represses what is before his eyes.

In v. 20 what was summed up in v. 19 as 'what can be known about God' is defined as 'his eternal power and deity' (or Godhead - so the AV). These two words are of great importance. In the history of human religion some very remarkable tendencies are always discernible. One is the belief that God is the far-away God, sitting upon His heavenly throne but too far removed for us to come into contact with Him. That is what is meant when we speak of 'high' gods. There are many high gods in the world, gods which are acknowledged as such by various peoples, but which have no real place in their religious life. They are too distant, and therefore these people prefer to pray to other powers, to souls and ghosts. God is the

creator, He has made the world and all that is in it, but He is not the object of adoration or of prayer. Such gods are regarded as more or less distant beings, powerless in actual life. God does not come to us, He cannot do anything for us.

Another tendency revealed in the history of religions is to regard God as an impersonal power, as mere power. He is not an 'I' but an 'it'. Man in his religion is always inclined to leave out one of the two: either he sees God only as a far-away God, and leaves out His power in human life, or else he regards God solely as impersonal power but does not see that God is God, a personal Lord. These two central tendencies are clearly discernible in the history of human religion.

It is therefore highly instructive that Paul here mentions these two very things – the power and the Godhead. It seems as if he wants to preclude any attempt to reduce God to mere impersonal power, and at the same time to exclude every possibility of making God a high God, far away in unreachable regions without any impact on daily life. St. Paul says that through all the centuries the two notions that God is both the person to whom we can pray and are responsible, and at the same time everlasting power, press themselves naturally upon men. These two attributes of God are clearly seen, being understood by (AV) or perceived in (RSV) the things that have been made. Both these renderings are preferable to the New English Bible's 'have been visible to the eye

of reason'. The Greek *nooumena*, lit. 'being intelligently observed', emphasizes that seeing with the eye is not intended in this verse; but at the same time it does not mean that seeing God's everlasting power and Godhead is attained by a process of reasoning. It is reached not as a logical conclusion but in a moment of vision. It comes suddenly upon man; it overwhelms him. But still it does not lead to real knowledge. Man escapes God's clasp, represses the truth and so is without excuse.

Nevertheless in v. 21 we read that man must in fact be regarded as one who knows: 'although they knew God they did not honour him as God'. In the great lawsuit between God and man, the latter cannot plead that he did not know God. He knows God but he never comes to real knowledge because he is always busy resisting this knowledge in the subtlest of ways. He clings to his own egocentric pattern of life with desperate tenacity. As a result man has gone further and further astray. All his thinking has ended in futility and his misguided mind is plunged in darkness. In this connexion the apostle thinks of the pagan religions as he has seen them himself, with their statues, their superstitions and all their infatuation. He does not mean to say that these people have consciously and deliberately rejected the truth of God. It normally takes place unconsciously and unintentionally, but it happens nevertheless and man is guilty. The aerial of his heart can no longer receive the wavelength of God's voice, although His voice surrounds him on all sides. In his innermost being, man has turned

away from God and now God has vanished out of sight.

The next verses show us the result of this attitude. It is remarkable that three times in this passage Paul uses the verb 'exchange'. In doing so he once again touches upon one of those very remarkable phenomena which take place in the souls of men. It has been discovered that the repressed impulses, of which we spoke earlier and which are left to operate in our unconscious, are not dead. They are still strong and try repeatedly in all kinds of ways to come into play. True, they have no part in conscious life, but they succeed occasionally in showing that they still exist, like the school-boy sent out of the class room who keeps on throwing stones against its windows to show that he is still there. Freud has particularly highlighted this phenomenon and inaugurated its study. He has shown that these impulses which pass their exile in the unconscious reveal themselves in errors we make, in slips of the tongue, but most especially in dreams. It is then that they get a chance to come to the surface. This does not mean that they appear openly in dreams; a sort of censorship remains which causes them to appear only, or at least preferably, in disguise. Here the process of exchange or substitution comes into the picture. Repressed impulses come to the surface but are now changed; they have another form, another shape. Other figures are substituted for them. Psychologists are inclined to think that what we see in our dreams is a translated, transformed expression of repressed elements in our subconscious. It

seems to me that the process of exchanging the truth of God of which Paul is speaking here is an illustration of that same idea of substitution which is found in modern psychology. Elements of the truth of God are exiled to the unconscious, to the crypts of man's existence. They have not vanished altogether; they are still active and reveal themselves again and again. But they cannot become openly conscious; they appear in disguise. Something else is exchanged or substituted for them. As Calvin said, the human spirit is a factory of idols. Man begins to create ideas, myths and stories about God of every kind; not by intentional deceit - it happens without man's knowing it, as it were.

These images come from his inmost being and hold him in their spell. He cannot get rid of them. He has his religion, he is busy with God, he serves his God, but he does not see that the God he serves is not God Himself. An exchange has taken place, a perilous exchange. Some essential quality of God has been pushed into the background because it does not fit in with the human pattern of his life. The image man has of God is no longer true. Divine revelation indeed lies at the root of it but because it is not accepted in human thought it is repressed. In the image man has of God he can recognize the image of himself.

We have seen already that the result of all this, thrice-repeated, is: 'God gave them up'. God gave them up to the vileness of their own desires and the consequent degradation of their bodies (v. 24). He gave them up to

The Supper of
Friend?

- What?!

shameful passions (v. 26). And He gave them up to their own depraved reason (v. 28). Man can no longer resist the powers in him which carry him along. St. Paul no doubt had in his own day seen abundant proof in the degenerate way of life of the Roman Empire of what man comes to when God abandons him to his own desires. He had also seen that human religion has no defence against this degeneration. And from all this he has learned what may happen when man exchanges the true image of God for any kind of myth. The ethical force of religion is weakened, because man lets his own inclinations join consciously or unconsciously in forming an idol fashioned according to his own thoughts.

Gen. Rev.
If we have understood Paul correctly so far, there are a few further points which we must consider. First, it is clear that the existence of a general revelation is undeniably taught here. Hendrik Kraemer has called the phrase 'general revelation' a misleading term. He claims that the 'whole concept is, in its ordinary use, tainted by all kinds of notions contrary to the way the Bible speaks about revelation'. There is certainly some truth in this claim. A concept of general revelation has been used too much in the philosophical sphere. It has been taken for granted that autonomous reason could lead men to a certain body of natural theology. But the revelation of which Paul speaks here is entirely different. The conclusions of philosophic reasoning are not under discussion at all. In this context the Bible accentuates God's everlasting concern for men. 'He left not himself without witness'.

Time and again man is confronted with the certainty that God exists and actually encounters him. But each time man resists these impressions and escapes them. Yet God still concerns Himself fully and personally with man. It is not easy to explain how God does it, but it happens.

General revelation is a very important factor in world history. God meets man in many ways and man is aware of it too, although he continually tries to resist it. If we want to use the term 'general revelation', we must not use it as if one can conclude the existence of God from the revelation by logical reasoning. This may be possible but it only leads to a philosophic notion of God as first cause. Such is not the biblical conception of general revelation, for in the Bible this has a much more personal nature. It is divine concern for the totality of mankind and for each individual. His everlasting powers are plain to us; they overwhelm man; they strike him suddenly, in moments when he thought they were far away they creep up on him; they do not let go of him, even though man does his best to escape. Escaping, repressing is the human answer to God's revelation, an answer that becomes visible in the history of the religion of man.

We are here given an understanding of the phenomena of human religion. The heathen who believes in gods and spirits and bows down before his idol, shows that he is touched by God and that God has in some sense sought him. But at the same time he reveals that he has himself been busy repressing what is absolutely neces-

sary if one wants to come to God. His image of God is distorted. Something essential is eliminated. He may not have done this intentionally but all the same he is without excuse. He has received an image of God from his parents, has grown up with the religion to which he adheres. But his religious life contains something very personal, something belonging only to him. While seeking God intimately, he at the same time tries to escape Him. His religion is always ambiguous, full of hesitation and discrepancies. We can apply this in the case of the Buddha. He gained great new insight concerning the world and human life. God touched him and struggled with him. God existed in that moment. Buddha answered to it in his way. In this answer the hand of God is still visible, but so too is the result of human repression and substitution. The case is the same when we think of Mohammad. In the night in which Mohammad received his first revelation, the night on which the Koran says that the angels descended, God concerned Himself with him and touched him. God struggled with him on that night. And God's hand is still visible in the answer of the prophet, but so also is the result of human repression and human substitution.

The history of religion contains a dramatic element. It includes divine approach and human rejection, rejection hidden by the appearance of man's concern with God. But the god whom man seeks is different from the true God because the uncanny process of repression and exchange has been at work.

If this is true, various kinds of distinctions can be made. Man is always ready to repress and to exchange, but is he always successful in these two things? God can at times stop, as it were, the noiseless engines of repression and substitution and overwhelm a man to such a degree that he is for the moment powerless. We must also take account of the work of the Holy Spirit within a man, even if he constantly resists it. The way in which Isaiah speaks of Cyrus, the anointed king who was called by name and girded by God, indicates that the Bible certainly leaves us with the possibility that God may anoint men with His Spirit, and gird to a task to which He calls them those who do not really know Him. This is evidence that there are gradations in the history of man's religion. I am not now speaking of religions as systems, but of individuals regarded as adherents of those religions. In my own missionary service I more than once met Muslims and Hindus who we felt were not very far from the kingdom of God. Their whole approach to the problem of religion was remarkably true, remarkably serious. In such cases, we may come to the conclusion that God has been very active also outside the boundaries of His Church.

The history of religion is a very remarkable thing; its main theme is that holy work of God in His general revelation to which man is always reacting. Because the hand of God is still visible in some way, that gives us room to go into individual lives and to approach them with the important question how they per-

sonally have reacted to what God has been doing with them. When we preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ, we do not begin the discussion; our listeners already have history behind them, there has already been a certain discussion with God. As we preach the Gospel, the drama between God and man starts a new period. Now it becomes more dangerous but also more hopeful; Christ now appears to man in a new form. He was already present in man's seeking and because He did not leave Himself without a witness, Christ was already wrestling to gain a man although the man did not know it. The profound words of St. John describe this when he speaks of 'the true light that enlightens every man'; 'the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it'. In the preaching of the Gospel this same Christ once again appears to man but in much more concrete and visible form. He awakes man from his long disastrous dream. The repression and the exchange are done with at last, but only in believing surrender.

It has always been my experience that the men and women with whom we come into contact in missionary work in the course of serious discussion begin to acknowledge that they have already had an experience of God, and begin to become aware of the fact that they have already acted upon revelation. I always felt that we could preach the Gospel of Christ to them in the certainty that they themselves would come to acknowledge that they recognized what we were speaking of and began to feel it had a bearing on what they had done already, but that a new chapter of their life was now opened.

good work ✓

Joseph Bustillos
MT 533: Theology of Religious Encounter
January 18, 1985

Essay Review: God and the Gods: reviewing the Biblical Roots, by Richard R. DeRidder.

Dr. DeRidder begins his essay with a voice of concern over the "resurgence of old, established religions" that have found a "universal validity" in our midst. Because the unique claims made by Christianity and also because of the faulty rationalizations on the part of some Christian missions (eg., "Laymen's Inquiry: Re-thinking Missions") the question concerning "Religions versus True Religion" is on DeRidder's mind. ✓

He is quite straight forward about his presuppositions. He's not concerned with what's true about a particular religion but what the Bible says in terms of that religion. The Bible is the standard by which all other things are judged. From here he seems to follow Kaufmann's argument (with a different emphasis, of course) that the Bible knows no other God than YHWH and that these other "gods" are merely man-made idols. Any reality that they seem to possess is from the imagination of the minds that made them. They are nothing. Consequently it's not a matter of all roads leading to the same God but "In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent." (Acts 17:30) The message seems rather straight forward to me. ✓

In chapter 5 of Courage For Dialogue Samartha would find fault with DeRidder's position on the basis that the Bible knows nothing about Islam or Buddha or any of the Post-Apostolic Religions. Samartha argues that all truth is God's truth and revelation or enlightenment should be a two-way street between the Christian and the non-Christian. DeRidder, however, will not see beyond the point that the only mark of validation is in the pages of Sacred Scripture and that the testimony of the Bible is that "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved." (Acts 4:12). ✓

A question comes to my mind in the way that DeRidder uses the his biblical texts. He attempts to disprove the validity of non-Christian religions on the basis of the Bible's attitude toward these religions. He says, "Christianity cannot address men and ignore their gods." (p. 146). But I really wonder if an Old Testament treatment on the fallacy of Baal worship is adequate ammunition to disarm the claims of the Baha'i faith or any other religion that doesn't follow idol worship. Sounds to me like Christianity sitting on its laurels again.

The exclusivistic claims of Christianity put Christians in the uncomfortable position of "speaking the truth in love." And rather than getting myself lost in Samartha's naive vision of religious brotherhood I'd rather slug it out with DeRidder and hang on to the Gospel. "Thank you very much."

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1 Jn 5:19 / 1 Cor 2:15

God and the Gods: Reviewing the Biblical Roots

RICHARD R. DE RIDDER

In many quarters today inter-religious dialogue is identified as "the esse" of Christian mission. This emphasis on dialogue is increasingly generating a euphoria that is buttressed by much extravagant language: the Gospel of Jesus Christ "need not be exclusive"; the "wider ecumenism" to which we are called only demands that the world's diverse peoples "share each other's spirituality" — they do not need to be "converted." On and on. However, by this paper Professor De Ridder confronts us with the stark biblical witness to God — and also the gods — data that can easily be overlooked in the current debate.

AN INVESTIGATION into the biblical data regarding the relationships of the worship and service of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ and the faith commitments of men to other gods is important today. The importance of this subject must be seen against the background of the resurgence of old, established religions whose truth claims are being heralded today beyond the traditional peoples and nations which have for so long time been committed to these faiths and whose social orders have been developed according to the basic concepts of these faiths concerning God, man and the universe. A new kind of universal validity of these faiths is being zealously promoted in our day. Sometimes this "evangelistic" fervor has risen from

the encounter of the faith with Christianity and the resulting passionate desire to proclaim its counterclaims to Christianity. At other times Western aberrations have appeared, promoted by westerners themselves who have laid claim to the right to share in and appropriate what they will of these non-Christian faiths. In still other instances aberrations of the faith have risen within the body of its followers and aggressively spilled over into the world with an accompanying strong sense of missionary zeal.

Whatever the background, no westerner today needs to leave the boundaries of his own country to meet representatives of the world's religions. Temples, mosques and ashrams are at his very doorstep and often within the shadow of his churches. It is no longer true that we encounter these faiths solely on their home territory. They have invaded our own. Not the least of the shocks we have received concerns the fact that these faiths have at times had an enviable measure of success in reaching some groups within our society to which we have not been able to minister effectively. Even those who by traditional categories were considered to be safely within the Christian fold have shocked parents and church by embracing such faiths and becoming apostles of them.

The importance of such an investigation as this must also be seen from the viewpoint of what has been happening within traditional Christian communities. The sometimes blatant universalism that is heralded to our age has resulted from the reappraisal of the nature of the Christian mission that had been going on for a long time. It found its clearest definition in the *Laymen's Inquiry: Re-thinking Missions* (Hocking 1932). Christianity was reduced to an ethnic basis in common harmony with the non-Christian religions. Christianity was not regarded as unique, as the only avenue to God. God, we were told, can be found in all religions. A nucleus of religious truth lies at the heart of all religious creeds. Christianity differs from other faiths only in degree. There is no urgency to propagate the Christian faith. The *Inquiry* pleaded for a common search for truth, for the recognition of the good and the bad in all religions, because each religion supplements the others. Along with the disappearance of the self-revealing, self-disclosing God of revelation the idea that the heathen without Christ are lost also disappeared. This was by no means either the first or the last time such sentiments were expressed. The *Inquiry* is datable and

an articulate presentation of the position. In recent years, too, this universalism has surfaced. Hopefully it will drive us to search what the Scriptures say about the faith of the non-believer.

Some Pre-Suppositions

This paper is based on certain suppositions. First of all, I shall not deal with such questions as truth — if there be such — in the non-Christian religions. This is intended to be in the nature of a biblical study and will be concerned with the question of the biblical stance towards other religions and faiths. The suggested guidelines of this article will not be irrelevant, however, for finding an answer to that question. One must walk cautiously in this area because it is so very easy to draw conclusions or shift subjects while defining the biblical perspective.

A second supposition concerns the nature of revelation. In much of the literature the form the question (and hence also the answer) takes concerns the character of revelation: what has God revealed to other peoples and nations concerning himself? Where is God in the world? Has he hid himself from man? Is the knowledge man has of God adequate or inadequate? What chance do non-Christian peoples have? I do not find these forms of the question in the Bible. I do find that we are told that of whatever sort it is, however we may characterize it, or by whatever categories we may name it, all revelation is the self-revelation of the one true God. His clearest, fullest, salvatory revelation comes to us in and through the Bible only. But the Bible itself is but the distillate (condensed and preserved for us by the Spirit of God) of a much greater measure of revelation (Jn 20:30). Everything, in other words, has not been recorded for us. But whether it is recorded or unrecorded, whether directed to man as God's creature or as redeemed man, whether "general" or "special," it is the revelation of God no matter how man receives it or what it is he receives.

There is a tendency among Christians to draw such distinctions within the revelation of God to man which leaves one with the impression that God can hardly be serious when he reveals himself to the non-Christian world. It is easy to concentrate on the "limitations" of general revelation in a way that one loses sight of the true purpose of God through it. It is not uncommon to read backward from man's abuse of that

revelation to God who gave it as though God himself is somehow (or at least partially) responsible for what man has done simply because he didn't make himself clear to mankind. That is a false way of dealing with revelation. Paul explicitly states that "what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made" (Rom 1:19-20).

In this article we shall not concentrate on the questions of revelation and truth. The Bible is truth and we shall deal with it as such. What is assumed is that there can be no true claim to the Christian distinctiveness that ignores the actuality of divergent and alternative interpretations of human experience or lives by deliberate isolation from the significance of men's gods. Christianity cannot address men and ignore their gods. But what are their gods? What reality is attributed to them in the Scriptures? What attitudes must we assume towards them?

Terminology

A brief comment is also in order concerning the use of the term "non-Christian." This is in many respects an inadequate description, but I know of no acceptable substitute. The term fails to denote the inner content of the cultures and faiths to which it is applied. In some contexts it has no more value than the description "non-Buddhist" would have as applied to Christianity. Such a term says little or nothing about the heart of Christianity. On the other hand, the term "non-Christian" does imply a kind of relationship to a Person, the Christ, and this is central in the Christian faith and in its proclamation.

A more difficult problem in terminology concerns the way in which the Old Testament and New Testament faith is described. These are one and the same, yet the term "Christian" can hardly be applied to the Old Testament. Nor would the term "Jewish faith" serve, since it now has connotations which too completely separate it from the Christian faith. The true faith is a unity of both covenants and is written from the perspective of the single mission of God which began in Paradise and will be consummated when the kingdoms of this world become the kingdoms of our God and of his Christ.

A similar problem confronts us in the use of the words "true"

and "false." The difference is not quite so simple as black and white (true and false) might suggest. When used in this article the term "true religion" means the historic, biblically-based faith of the people of God and has no implications with regard to the falseness or truth of religious claims. My own position is that Christianity is the one only true faith and with the early apostles I subscribe to the creed that "there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

A Biblical Perspective

The first and primary observation that must be made is that the Bible nowhere speaks of other religions as *systems*, or in the way we are accustomed to speak of them as articulated in the canons of these faiths. The biblical stance is that there is a people of God which is distinguished from other people(s) who do not know or acknowledge this one true God. It has been observed that the Scriptures do not even speak of "heathendom" *per se* (Blauw 1950:1). Even when some reference is made to personal religious commitment other than to Yhwh there is some concrete occasion for doing so. Freitag observes that God has chosen a people whom he has taken into his care as one might adopt a foundling child (Ezek 16). There are other peoples who do not stand in this relationship and therefore represent the negative counter-concept to the concept of a chosen people (Freitag 1957:31).

This Old Testament concept finds expression in the New Testament where Paul reminds the Ephesian Christians of their background and calls them to

remember that at one time you Gentiles . . . were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world (Eph 2:11-12).

It was through the gracious work of God that this was all changed, however, for now

you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the chief cornerstone (Eph 2:20).

One gains a new and richer appreciation of what Paul is saying when one successfully frees himself from the limiting concepts that often govern our reading of the Old Testament. The Old

Testament is not just the story of God's dealings with Israel (Blaauw 1950:5ff; Bavinck 1960:11ff; De Ridder 1975). When looked at in that way it is little more than narratives, comparable to the legends common to most peoples who seek by means of a strange mixture of fact and fiction to give their answers as to where they came from and what their prerogatives are in the midst of a confusing host of "non-peoples."¹ The Bible is *revelation*. The narratives are stories told "with a view to . . ." or "for the purpose of . . ." This revelation is redemptive. It tells us what God is doing or has done to assert his claims upon his creation and creatures and to redeem his people.

This redemption involves becoming one with the people of God and hence a part of God's mission in world history. It has implications as well for our mission under God. The apostle Peter uses the word *exaggelo* in I Peter 2:9 to describe the purpose for which God creates this body. It is, he says, "that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light." The word "declare" describes the duty of a messenger who brings out news from within. This person, in classical Greek dramas, tells the spectators what is going on behind the scenes.² We become the interpreters to the world of the meaning of salvation history. We, as it were, "have the facts" and know the plot. However, we are also part of the cast and relate both to the playwright as well as to the actors in the drama and the people in the audience. It is not without reason that Peter immediately follows this beautifully expressed truth with the declaration, "Once you were no people, but now you are God's people" (I Pet 2:10).

The prophets frequently indicted the people of God for not being true to what God had done for them (cf. the book of Hosea, e.g.). The history of Israel was recited over and over again in terms of God's deeds for his people and the puzzling, irrational response of the people. Israel's liturgy repeated the refrain. Psalm 78, e.g., presents this peculiar phenomenon in terms of a parable and asks: how is it possible for a people to experience such great wonders as Israel experienced and then turn around and forget God and what he had done? (Ps 78:11,32,56) It just did not make sense to the Psalmist. Israel is frequently indicted for turning away from her God to serve other gods.

The point I am concerned to make is that in order to

understand the gods as referred to in the Bible one must understand the people who serve them. Idolatry and image worship are from the Bible's viewpoint not just expressive of the relation of men to an idol but of man's relationship to God. It is a relationship that may be the result of a deliberately chosen rejection of Yhwh. It may be a covenant relationship established by divine sovereignty and initiative. It may simply be "the way things are" among the nations that do not know God.

The relationship of Israel to its God is expressed in Deuteronomy as follows:

For you are a people holy to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for his own possession, out of all the peoples that are on the face of the earth. It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the Lord set his love upon you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples; but it is because the LORD loves you, and is keeping the oath which he swore to your fathers, that the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt (7:6-8).

Commenting on what he describes as a "total theology of Israel," Johannes Blauw makes the following conclusions on the basis of this pericope:

1. Israel was chosen by Yhwh for his own possession.
2. This distinguishes Israel from all other peoples.
3. Israel was by this act of God constituted as a people, holy unto their Lord.
4. God had no special point of contact on the basis of which he chose Israel.
5. There was no reason why God could not have chosen another nation in place of Israel.
6. God chose Israel out of love alone.
7. God faithfully kept his covenant with Israel's forefathers.
8. This election found its historical expression in the exodus from Egypt (1950:11).

Israel was constantly challenged to live its life in terms of its election by God. Yhwh had also done great things and worked mighty signs among other peoples. The Philistine exodus from Crete and the Aramean exodus from Kir were also his work (Amos 9:7). Exodus (migration) in and by itself says nothing about the special nature of a people. Yhwh sets the boundaries of all peoples, including Israel (Deut 32:8).

The entire Genesis record must be read in terms of what Yhwh was doing for the world in his dealings with Israel. The reader of Genesis must witness the passing of long millennia before God introduces his chosen people by revealing himself to

Abraham. Even then, as Genesis 12:1-3 makes clear, the focus of God's dealings is in the peoples of the earth who will receive his blessing through the promise to which he has bound himself that in Abraham all the families of the earth will be blessed.³

Israel's distinctiveness is that God chose that particular people for himself. By way of contrast we can say of the heathen that they have chosen their gods. Isaiah's graphic description of the image maker and idolator (Isa 44:9-20) sets before the people the foolishness of pretending there are other gods besides Yhwh. Man may give free reign to his imagination but Yhwh is not aware of any other gods. Hosea speaks for God (13:4) with the strong reminder that revelation came only from God ("you know no God but me"). Therefore the silly kissing of cleverly and artistically fashioned images of calves is but an expression of willful ignorance.

When Israel was given possession of the land, the Canaanite peoples were dispossessed because they served other gods (Deut 7; 8:19-20; 9:1-5; 18:12; 20:16-18). For Israel, curiosity with respect to the worship of other nations was forbidden (Deut 12:29-31). The memory of their forefathers would always conjure up for them the reminder not only of God's election by grace but of the fact that these forefathers "served other gods" beyond the river (Josh 24:2). The land belonged in a special way to Yhwh who gives it to whomever he pleases. It is even possible for elect Israel to be regarded as a stranger (*ger*) in its own land because the land belonged to Yhwh (Lev 25:23). The plagues of Egypt were the seal of Yhwh's victory, not alone over Pharaoh and his court, but over Egypt's gods.

The Reality of the Gods

The above introduction raises an important question: what reality does the Bible ascribe to the gods of the heathen? That the pagan ascribes reality to the god as imaged in the idol or even to the idol itself is not really important. The question we must answer is this: is there any reality behind the gods?

A partial answer is: nothing! Isaiah's taunt of the idol maker is a clear statement of this. The Bible frequently speaks the Lord's word in the familiar oracle, "I am the Lord and there is no other" (Isa 45:6; 47:8). However, there are also passages in which a kind of reality is understood as being behind the outward

appearance. Men are sometimes referred to as gods (Ps 82:6). Yhwh is sometimes pictured as seated among the gods:

God has taken his place in the divine council; in the midst of the gods he holds judgment: How long will you judge unjustly and show partiality to the wicked? (Ps 82:1-2) Do you indeed decree what is right, you Gods? (Ps 58:1)

These references to the gods must be taken in the sense of judges or rulers among men who are regarded as divine representatives at sacred places or as reflecting divine majesty and power (Brown 1907:43). In yet other passages the gods are represented as bowing down before Yhwh. Psalm 97:7 reads, "All worshipers of images are put to shame, who make their boast in worthless idols; all gods bow down before him." In every instance where similar expressions are used the uncompromised sovereignty and uniqueness of Yhwh is emphasized. In the same Psalm (97:8) God is described as being "far above all gods."

How are we to understand this? On the one hand it appears from such passages as the above that the gods find their reality in the persons who fashion them and worship them. They have no reality of their own except insofar that man's fertile imagination gives them reality. Men act the way they do because of the nature they have ascribed to their gods. Created in the image of God, man makes for himself gods in his own image and then models himself after the image he has created (Rom 1:24-25; Ps 115:8).

Another viewpoint of the reality of the gods is presented in passages such as I Corinthians 10:19-20: "What do I imply then? That food offered unto idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? No, I imply that what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God." Paul very likely is applying a passage such as Deuteronomy 32:17 to his own day, for there it is said that Israel "sacrificed to demons which were no gods, to gods they had never known, to new gods who had come in of late, whom your fathers had never dreaded." It is utter nonsense to ascribe reality to what is not real, to exchange the clear, true revelation of God for the fruits of an overactive imagination (revelation for non-revelation), to trade the God of the ages for the fierce, unloving gods of the peoples, to choose dread in place of love! Yet that is precisely what the idolater does. To him submission to the gods is mastery achieved through manipulation. He regards his foolishness he evaluates as though it were the ultimate wisdom.

In reality what he is doing is submitting himself to the slavery of demonic powers. Psalm 106:37 pictures Israel as sacrificing children to the demons (LXX uses the term "demons" for the Hebrew which is "non-entities" or "nothings"). The test, writes Isaiah in 41:21 ff., of the gods' claims to deity is whether they have the course of history in their power and are able to predict the future. What the Scriptures say, it appears to me, is that the idol is nothing in itself. It neither represents reality nor is it reality. Before it was fashioned it was wood, stone or metal available for any number of purposes. After it was manufactured, it remained wood, stone or metal. There is no reality behind it. There are no other gods. Idolatry was and is the instrument of demons who seek to divert to themselves the worship of God. Its culmination will come in Anti-Christ who will sit in the temple of God as though he were god. Satan can be referred to as the "god of this world" (I Cor 10:20), but his claims are nowhere accepted as legitimate in the Scriptures (Recker 1971).

Naaman (II Kings 5)

An interesting, yet often puzzling, passage that sheds some helpful light on our subject is found in II Kings 5:1-9. It is the story of Naaman, servant of the king of Syria but a leper. All the trappings of diplomacy and all diplomatic channels are mustered to secure his cure. The incident clearly shows that healing is not obtained by worldly power (the demand of the Syrian suzerain); the show of force (horsemen and chariots); nor by worldly wealth (gold, silver, fine clothes); nor by worldly prestige (Naaman's high position); nor by worldly procedures (magic words and acts); nor by worldly exploits (Naaman was willing to do anything except wash in the Jordan); nor by some worldly agency (the rivers of Syria). The only way Naaman could secure the desired cure would be to pass through the waters of Jordan as Israel had done.

One is tempted to dwell longer on the many implications of this passage from the redemptive-historical perspective or from its mission implications and meaning. This would go beyond our purpose, however. Two major concerns must be isolated from the narrative for comment.

(1) The request for a load of "sacred soil." At first it appears as though Naaman, in spite of his quieted rage and humble

confession (vs 15), has not divested himself from some of the notions of his pagan background. Nevertheless, instead of viewing this as a poor beginning we must regard it as very promising! He wishes to take with him into the profane pagan world to which he is returning something of the "sacred." This mule's load of dirt was probably no more fertile than the soil of Syria, but that isn't the point. The dirt will become his altar to the only God who cured him and by grace related him to his people Israel.

(2) The second request of Naaman is more difficult. His official duties required that he accompany the king when the king worships his god Rimmon. Then Naaman must bow. It is then that we have the climax of the story. Elisha says neither "yes" nor "no," only "Go in peace." No sort of law is delineated for Naaman or any other person. No generalization is possible. It is, as von Rad implies, as though Elisha is doing what God's "Elijah" would do centuries later: "He looked on him and loved him." Naaman returns but there are no rules or regulations. He must live out of the grace that related him to the people of God (the soil will remind him of this) and in utter loyalty to the confession and vow he made before the Lord, Israel, the Syrian armed band, and God's prophet: "Behold I know that there is no God in all the earth but in Israel . . . henceforth your servant will not offer burnt-offering or sacrifice to any god but the Lord" (vss 15,17). Elisha "sends him forth into all the destitutions of paganism and leaves him with his faith" (von Rad 1977:62ff).

Paul at Lystra

The miracle which Paul accomplished in the healing of a man of Lystra who had never walked (Acts 14:8-18) led to the mistaken identification by the people of Paul and Barnabas as Hermes and Zeus. Paul's response to the resultant enthusiastic welcome for the dieties helps us gain some understanding as to the content the Gospel message declares over against such false faiths.⁴ Paul's urgent appeal to the enthusiastic people and their priest includes the following elements: (1) Paul and Barnabas could not be gods for they were only men. (2) They were not gods but brought a message from God. (3) The living God was the Creator of all.⁵ (4) His desire was that men should turn from their vain things. (5) God has given a witness to himself in the world around us. By this statement Paul asserts that the

prerogatives of their many gods in reality belong to the one true and living God. No reality is claimed for the deities they worshipped. No powers are ascribed to them. They are usurpers of God's place. They are in fact only "vain things". This word (*mataios*) denotes the world of appearance as distinct from that of being. It is deception. The honor and worship accorded the gods are in fact "pointless" because there is no reality to them; they have no content. There is an inner self-contradiction in the worship of such deities, especially if Paul and Barnabas are regarded as "gods". So long as they are men like the citizens of Lystra they do not fulfill the dictum of their own philosophers: "All earthly being is as smoke . . . only the gods abide." There are no god-like men no more than there is any reality to man-like gods.

Peter (I Pet 1:18) uses the same expression to indicate the emptiness of the pseudo-divine powers from which we have been redeemed. He reminds us that God's people come under judgment the moment they cease to hold solely to God's revelation. Paul's address, therefore, makes good sense. Idols and gods are "vain" because the only reality they have is in the imagination of men who set aside the divine command (Acts 14:15) in arrogant self-deception by rejecting or failing to act consistently with the knowledge they have of the revelation of God (Acts 14:17). Their guilt consists in ascribing to non-sensical, imaginary deities the plainly seen acts of God. The believing community incurs a similar judgment when it ascribes to God an act which he has not done (I Cor 15:17) or turns aside from the faith and returns to vain things formerly held to be valid (I Pet 1:18) Bauernfiend 1967).

Johannes Blauw summarizes his conclusions from this passage in the following statements:

1. Paganism is the deification of man.
2. Paganism is essentially "useless."
3. The heathen need a change of direction, conversion.
4. The heathen have throughout the ages lived under God's rule but without acknowledging God.
5. There has always been a genuine witness to God through the gifts he showers on the heathen.
6. This witness is, however, not recognized (given attention) (1950:132).

Paul at Athens

A passage of singular importance for this study is found in

Acts 17:16-34 and is the record of Paul's address on the Areopagus of Athens. There is a basic presupposition which I make with respect to this passage and which in a decisive way determines my viewpoint of what Paul's address is all about. I believe this passage may not be regarded as merely an act of Paul. For if it is so regarded, then to all appearances at least, it becomes the point of greatest failure and misdirected preaching by the apostle in all the biblical record. Then Paul was a failure and did fail in Athens. Then Paul's philosophical excursions and poetic references are simply evidence of what happens when a man preaches from sources other than the Gospel. This position is in fact held by some who also judge that Paul's letter to the Corinthians reflects his later judgment that his speech on the Areopagus was an ill-judged experiment which he regretted and that he was censuring himself when he wrote that he "decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (I Cor 2:2). There is no evidence that Paul had the Athen's episode in mind when he wrote those words to the Corinthians.

The approach we must take to the passage is that we are witnesses here to the initiative of the Spirit who employs the gifts of the preacher. The passage is a summary. The sermon was cut short. It is clearly a response from within the heart of Paul to the oppression of spirit he felt because of the revulsion he experienced over against Athenian idolatry. Paul was very articulate on Mars Hill and we are privileged spectators to the now ages-old clash between the true faith and the pagan traditions of men.⁶

Paul's text for his sermon (if we must give it one) was taken from a wayside shrine: "To the God whom it may concern." This god is regarded as significant enough to have an altar. Unfortunately, he cannot be identified. Nevertheless, we do him honor, the city said, even though we don't know his name. Our pantheon of gods is full, but not too full to include one more whom we've overlooked.

Perhaps they were simply being prudent in a very clever way, for each man can interpret "whom it may concern" in his own way and thus one or even many gods will have their honor in Athens. We don't know their motivation. This does not hinder Paul from giving the indefinite "whom it may concern" an identity. He tells them of the God of the Gospel (vss 23 & 24). What Paul is telling them is that their predicate "unknown" must

be disowned by them because it is in reality not true to the facts of the case. The duty of the Christian witness is to reckon with the relevance of their ignorance and to correct it with the truth. Kenneth Cragg's insight into the apostle's purpose is helpful: "His (the apostle's) answers in Christ begin from the questions in men and, however remote from their goal, they serve to preface the way there" (1968:61). The disavowal of the "unknown" does not mean, as some have implied, that Paul is saying that this "unknown god" is one and the same as the true God (Grosheide 1945:65). This must be understood in the sense of John 4:24, where Jesus says to the Samaritan woman, "You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know."

It is then that Paul proceeds quite consistently with his purpose to declare what is known, taking his material *first of all* from revelation (vss 24-27), and only after that making reference to their own philosophers and poets. Paul uses the same words as the Athenians use: "known" and "unknown" but he gives them entirely different meanings. What the Athenians say is "unknown" Paul says is known, and their own poets can be cited as proof against the validity of their claims to ignorance. And what they claim to know (e.g., their superstitions and pantheon of gods) is basically ignorance for there is neither truth nor reality to these things and alleged gods.

The sermon on Mars Hill begins with God the Creator and man the creature. The distinctions Paul makes demonstrate the life of heathendom. God and his creation are two distinct entities, not to be confused, not equally eternal. The one true God is supreme. He is not dependent upon men or their shrines and to say so is to twist things completely around: God is not dependent on man; man is dependent on God who gives him breath and life and everything else he can name. All men are included. No nation is excluded. The history of every people is determined by him. He is not just the God of Greeks or Hebrews. He is the only truly "international" God.

Nowhere in Scripture does the accent fall on a nation, race or people as such. All mankind is the focus of God's divine goodness and under his sovereignty. For what reason? Verse 27 states God's purpose in all this: "that they might seek God, in the hope that they might feel after him and find him." This verse states clearly what is God's purpose in revealing himself to mankind: God gives man the opportunity to initiate the search

for God.⁷ Man must seek God in order to enter into a new relationship to him. Even though God is "not far from each one of us," he still must be sought for and found. God requires man to act. Paul speaks in the present tense; God is "yet" not far from us. The way to God is always open.

We must be careful in defining what Paul is saying here. He is not speaking about the question whether or not God can be found. The question is: ought one to seek after God? The implication is that a search after God involves something quite the opposite of what the Athenians had done and were continuing to do. They were satisfied to keep all their idols, shrines, temples, altars and liturgies. They were quite satisfied to erect an altar "to the God whom it may concern." But the erection of that strange, incongruous altar did not make them abandon all the rest! On the other hand, the man who seeks after God will accept the truth about the deities (they are false, empty, nothings) and reach out his hand to the God whose hand is already and has always been extended to him.

Verse 28 has given commentators even greater difficulty. It simply is not true that Paul is here agreeing with their own poet Aratus. He gives the quotation a totally different twist. The simple self-evident conclusion, in fact the only one that can be drawn from this is that God's own offspring certainly ought to know better than to imagine that God can be represented and pictured by anything made of gold, silver, wood or stone, no matter how skillfully done or how cleverly conceived. If God is greater than man (for we are his offspring — see Mark 3:38), then he cannot be likened to anything beneath man (pure material substance) which does not possess "life and breath" such as God has given man in creation. So what Paul is saying is that no image of any god whatsoever, no altar even to any "God incognito" does justice to either God or man. That is why he uses the word *Theios* ("the divine nature"), that which is peculiar to God, for any image of God would have to be embodied in the image.

Would the Athenians like to know what God is really like? Then they must consider what God offers them in Jesus Christ. A new era has dawned and the Athenians are privileged to be living in this age in which God no longer tolerates, puts up with man's foolish ignorance but has moved to restore man to himself in Jesus Christ. All men everywhere are commanded to repent.

Man must deal not only with his ignorance (vs 30; compare with the word "unknown" god). He must be concerned with the fact that his ignorance is disobedience and places him in danger of judgment. No man is without guilt before God (Rom 1). About this disobedience God has done something: he has judged his Son. The "man whom he has appointed" also gives power to men to become children of God, to all who receive him, who believe in his name (John 1:12).

The resurrection of Jesus, which is almost always referred to as the act of God who raised him from the dead, is the proof of God's purpose and intention. Referring once again to Johannes Blauw, the following conclusions must be drawn from this passage:

1. Paul describes the heathen as being ignorant, and are themselves aware of their ignorance.
2. There is no positive connection to a previous knowledge on their part, but merely to an acknowledgement of ignorance of the only true God, whom the Athenians could have known by virtue of the acts of God in creation and history.
3. The ignorance of the Athenians is no complete ignorance: they possess the knowledge of their relationship to God and with this the knowledge that God is something-other-than what he is represented as being in images.
4. Therefore the ignorance of man is regarded as guilt.
5. Man's guilt will be fully reckoned with as is evident from the call to conversion, as well as the judgment; men maintain their ignorance as is evidenced by the expression: the times of ignorance.
6. The call to conversion is motivated by the reference to Christ as world-judge. His resurrection from the dead is proof and confirmation of his credentials (1950:137).

Postscript

The conclusions that we can draw from this survey are important for the correct understanding of the mission of God and his Church. The gods have no real existence. There are no other gods, nor is man permitted to make other gods for himself. What then is mission all about? The apostle Paul described this in terms of his own call to service!

I send you to open their eyes, that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified in me (Acts 26:17-18).

What is new in this statement is the description of men as needing to be turned from (*Epistrepho*) the power of Satan to

God. With that statement we catch a glimpse at least of what the response which we solicit is to be: a turning away *from* involves a corresponding turning *to*. The God who so calls gives grace to respond. He is the God who calls men to do the impossible, but his call includes the power to do it. The man with the withered hand, who probably was keenly aware of his incapacity all his life, is told to stretch out his hand. And he can do it! The cause lies in him who gave the command. So too the crippled man at Bethesda Pool. How he must have wanted those 38 years to walk as other men. To him the Lord of all says, "Arise; take up your bed; walk!" And he is able to do what he is told. That is the power at work through us.

Notes

1. The term is used purposely. It is common for any people to identify themselves from all others. American Navahoes, e.g., call themselves "the people." See also Hosea 1:9 and parallels.
2. I am indebted to John H. Piet (1970:33) for this insight.
3. See my *Discipling the Nations* (1975) for a full development of the meaning of this universal covenant.
4. Johan H. Bavinck (n.d.:134) says, "In this chapter we undoubtedly have the clearest characterization that has been given of what paganism is" (translation is mine).
5. It is interesting to note how often and in what varied contexts the early church appealed to God as Creator. The Book of Acts contains a number of instances.
6. J.B. Phillips' first volume, *Letters to Young Churches*, contains a very helpful expanded version of the Areopagus address.
7. A popular and frequent distinction drawn by theologians between what is called general and special revelation roots general revelation in creation. This is not entirely accurate, however, if we remember what Paul says here. So-called general revelation has a redemptive focus: it drives obedient men to seek God, to institute a search for him. When man does not do this, he is disobedient and comes under the judgment of God.

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PRIMARY ISSUES



The Uniqueness and Universality of Christ

discussed by a Lutheran theologian

Carl E. Braaten



Resurgent "Universalism"

evaluated by Evangelical missionary

Michael Griffiths

Joe Bustillos
MT 533: Theology of Religious Encounter
1/11/85

good ✓

Essay Review: The Uniqueness and Universality of Jesus Christ, by
Carl E. Braaten

Dr. Braaten's contention centers on the problems created by the exclusivistic claim of Christianity in regards to mankind's eternal destination. Braaten portrays well the feelings of both sides of this controversy. The gist of his exposition is that by posing the problem in the manner that these two factions have, they have missed the point of the discussion.

On the side of the Exclusivists he contends that the claims of Jesus, where actual or interpreted by the Church, are to be taken in a literal manner and not to be thought of as anything but central to the claims of Christianity. On the side of the Universalists he says that when referring to "Salvation" we have to carefully define or meaning. Thus we have the exclusive claims of Jesus and the universality of salvation (in the case of salvation from Death, Jesus alone is in the running). He makes an interesting case for himself.

My feelings are that this is a creative peace of writing, but in the long run he may not be able to reconcile the difficulties in religious language posed by the other world faiths. He generalizes the attitude of these perspective faiths, and while this may point to how their theology is built around a particular concept (Buddha and Suffering) it in itself may be considered an over-generalization. ✓

The Uniqueness and Universality of Jesus Christ

Carl E. Braaten

I. The Heritage of Exclusiveness

The true identity of Jesus Christ has been mediated to us today in texts and traditions which unanimously confess that he is the exclusive medium of eschatological salvation. Acts 4:12 is the classical locus of this Christological exclusiveness: "And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." Christian exclusiveness has found several ways of manifesting itself. Traditionally, the Catholic type has focused on the church. "Outside the church there is no salvation." The statement first appeared in one of Cyprian's letters in the third century. It was reiterated in the papal bull *Unam sanctam* of Boniface VIII in 1302. "We believe that there is one holy catholic and apostolic church . . . outside of which there is no salvation. . . . We declare that it is necessary for salvation for every human creature to be subject to the Roman Pontiff."¹ Traditionally, the Protestant type has felt uncomfortable with the ecclesiocentric form of Roman Catholic exclusivism. It has focused instead on faith, quoting passages like John 3:18: "He who believes in him is not condemned; he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God." Also Romans 10:17: "So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes by the preaching of Christ."

The heritage of Christian exclusiveness runs deep into the New Testament and dominates the tradition from earliest times to the present. But from the beginning the very same tradition has created loopholes to provide people outside the Christian circle with the chance of salvation. Catholics of the most exclusive type conceded that people outside the church can be saved through the loopholes of "invincible ignorance" or "baptism by desire." Protestants in the older line of dogmatics appealed to 1 Peter 3:19, which states that Christ preached to the spirits in prison, as proof that people who did not encounter Christ and believe in this life would be given a "second chance" on the threshold of the future life. Sometimes they also talked about the invisible church whose limits are unknown, and thus presumably might also include

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some of the "noble pagans." The judgment that reservations will be taken in heaven only for Christians, that only those who accept Christ by faith in this life or belong to his church, **has seemed too harsh to be taken in a strictly literal sense.**

Currently, there are voices being raised against every sort of Christian exclusivism, including all the loopholes that continue to reinforce the underlying premise. The focus now takes the form of the question whether there is full and equal salvation through the non-Christian religions. The loopholes only provided an exceptional way of salvation. What is needed now is a full acknowledgment of the other major religions as valid ways of salvation. We are living in one world with a plurality of cultures, religions, and ideologies. Either we acknowledge the legitimacy of this pluralism, or we threaten the possibility of living together in a peaceful world. We expect governments, corporations, and other agencies to do their part to cooperate in establishing conditions which drive toward the unity of the human world without diminishing the plurality of its forms. Why should not the religions of the world do their part? Christianity has begun to open up channels of dialogue with people of other religions. But many feel that the exclusivistic premise that it brings to the dialogue clogs the channels and makes a real exchange impossible.

Professor John Hick of Birmingham, England has taken the lead among Protestants in calling for a "Copernican revolution,"² **which aims to overturn the Christological dogma at the bottom of all Christian exclusivism.** It is not enough to broaden the way of Christian salvation by speaking with Tillich of a "latent church" or with Rahner of "anonymous Christianity." Those are the convenient modern loopholes. He calls them "epicycles." So Hick goes deeper and lays the ax at the Christological roots of exclusivism. He says, "For understood literally the Son of God, God the Son, God-incarnate language implies that God can be adequately known and responded to *only* through Jesus; and the whole religious life of mankind, beyond the stream of Judaic-Christian faith is thus by implication excluded as lying outside the sphere of salvation."³ Pluralism is compatible with the unity of all

humankind if we acknowledge that the various streams of religion in the world carry the same waters of salvation leading to eternal life with God. God is at the center of the universe of faiths; Jesus is only one of the many ways—the Christian way—that leads to God. He is not the one and only Son of God, Lord of the world, and Savior of humankind. Each religion has its own, and they do the job in their own way. In this way John Hick has successfully rooted out the last vestige of exclusivism.

On the Catholic side the left wing of Rahner's school has also abandoned the Christian claim that Jesus Christ is "different," "decisive," "unique," "normative," or "final," toppling the pillar on which the traditional claims to exclusiveness lean. For surely it makes no sense to argue that believing in Jesus Christ or belonging to his church are essential for salvation, if he is ultimately only one among many founders pointing the way to God. Paul Knitter has made the clearest case I know among Catholics for a revision of the traditional claim that Jesus Christ is the one and only Savior of humankind, that he is the once-for-all revelation of God's eschatological salvation in store for the whole world. In "A Critique of Hans Küng's *On Being a Christian*,"⁴ Knitter like Hick lays his ax at the roots not only of the Christological dogma but of the apostolic kerygma as well. His motive is the same—to pave the way for dialogue with other religions that won't be "hamstrung" by the exclusivist mindset. He writes, "Intellectually and psychologically is it not possible to give oneself over wholly to the meaning and message of Jesus and at the same time recognize the possibility that other 'saviors' have carried out the same function for other people?"⁶ He answers "yes" and argues "that the claim for Jesus' exclusive uniqueness does not form part of the central assertions of Christian texts."⁷ The claim that salvation takes place in Jesus only can be chalked up to "the historically conditioned world view and thought-patterns of the time."⁸ Knitter concludes that there is no exclusive claim that belongs to the core of the Christian message. I think he would agree with Harnack that the exclusive element is not part of the

kernel, but only the husk of the gospel. Reading Hick and Knitter is an experience of *déjà vu*.

Far to the right of this antiexclusivist position we find a new affirmation of the heritage of exclusiveness among the neo-evangelicals who are conducting a vigorous campaign against every form of universalism. The idea that there is salvation in the non-Christian religions is denied point-blank. At Lausanne the evangelicals declared dogmatically that "it is impossible to be a biblical Christian and a universalist simultaneously."⁹ They now teach as dogmatic truth and as a criterion of being faithful to the gospel of Jesus Christ that all those who die or who have died without conscious faith in Jesus Christ are damned to eternal hell. If people have never heard the gospel and have never had a chance to believe, they are lost anyway. The logic of this position is that children who die in infancy are lost. The mentally retarded are lost. All those who have never heard of Christ are lost. Nevertheless, evangelicals cling to this view as the heart of the gospel and the incentive to mission.

I am convinced and I intend to argue that my friends to the left who teach that there are many saviors to accommodate a pluralistic world and my friends to the right who teach that only those who share their faith will be saved in the end are both wrong. They do not have the truth of the gospel on their side.

II. The Uniqueness of Jesus Christ

The tests and traditions that tell us about Jesus of Nazareth represent him as the expected Messiah of Israel, God's only Son, the Lord of creation, and the Savior of all humanity. We have no non-Christological picture of the historical Jesus.¹⁰ Every recollection of his identity is penetrated by an identification that raises his significance to the highest possible power. If one should wish to subtract all the special titles of identification, one is not left with the identity of Jesus who is really Jesus.¹¹ One is, rather, left with the question whether or not Jesus of Nazareth ever existed or

with an empty assertion of his naked historicity. But what of his meaning? What about his true identity?

When John the Baptists wondered about the true identity of Jesus, he asked, "Are you he who is to come, or shall we look for another?" (Mt. 11:3; Lk. 8:19). The answer of the early church was clear: Jesus is the One who was to come. He is the Messiah. Similarly, when Jesus asked his disciples on the way to Caesarea Philippi, "Who do men say that I am?" Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Mk. 8:27; Mt. 16:16). The New Testament abounds with titles that serve to identify the uniqueness of Jesus. The historical Jesus most probably did not designate his true identity in terms of such titles of honor as Christ, Son of God, Lord Savior, Logos, etc., but the early church did without any shadow of doubt.¹² These titles were conferred upon Jesus in the light of faith in the risen presence of Jesus. These are titles which in the same writings are bestowed upon God. Both God and Jesus are spoken of as Savior.¹³ Both God and Jesus are spoken of as Lord. Jesus is the Savior because he will save his people from their sins. Jesus is the Lord because God has raised and exalted him above all others. Jesus is the subject of names that are above all other names because they are the names of God. They speak eloquently of the uniqueness of Jesus. New Testament theologians argue, of course, whether these titles of honor go back to the historical Jesus himself, or whether they have been written back into the Gospel texts from the post-Easter situation of faith. In one sense it doesn't matter which side is correct. For both must agree that the Jesus of history is represented to us in texts and traditions that describe his uniqueness. He is depicted not as *a* son of God, but as *the* only begotten Son of God, not as *a* savior, but as *the* Savior, not as *a* lord, but as *the* Lord, etc. These designations of Jesus as Lord and Savior identify him as the foundation of divine salvation. They are not name-tags loosely attached to the personal reality to which they refer. There is no nominalism intended in the transference of high titles of honor to Jesus of Nazareth. If we strip away the names which are above all the names that generally apply to other human

beings, we have no way to speak of the meaning of Jesus. We can speak of him in the symbols of the texts and traditions, or we cannot speak of him at all, unless we fabricate our own image of Jesus and arbitrarily call him what we will. Nothing is more clear in the New Testament and the Christian tradition than the uniqueness of Jesus in whose name alone there is salvation, before whom every knee should bow and every tongue confess that he is Lord to the glory of God the Father (Phil. 2:10-11).

One of the earliest symbols of Christianity was the fish. In Greek the letters that spelled fish—*IXTHUS*—represented an ancient Christological confession: Jesus Christ Son of God Savior.¹⁴ By what other names can Jesus be known? These are symbols that participate in the reality to which they refer, to use Tillich's definition of a symbol. Christian faith has no knowledge or interest in Jesus as Jesus, minus the names which symbolize his unique meaning. These symbols have a prehistory in the religions of that time, but when transferred to Jesus they crown him with a significance that underscores his uniqueness. They do not mean that Jesus is unique as every individual is unique. Although he is truly human, these titles place him in a class by himself. He is the one and only Christ, or he is not the Christ at all. He is the one and only Son of God, or he is not God's Son at all. He is the one and only Savior or he is no Savior at all. The exclusive claim is not a footnote to the gospel; it is the gospel itself. Not part of the husk, it is the kernel itself. The answer of the gospel to John the Baptist's question, "Are you the one who is to come?" is "Yes, and we shall not look for another" (Mt. 11:3).

All the Christological titles of the texts and traditions of historic biblical and catholic Christianity intend to lift up the uniqueness of Jesus as the living Christ, the risen Lord, and the eschatological Savior of the world. They alone can legitimate the role that Jesus came to assume as the cultic center in primitive Christian worship. Without these titles that acclaim the exclusive uniqueness of Jesus, he loses the vehicles of interpretation by which he is no mere dead hero of the past, buried in the ruins of his own time and place, but

the living presence of God in the flesh. These titles—and they alone—tell us what the earliest believers in Jesus thought he was all about. They reveal the true identity of Jesus; at the core of this revelation is the exclusive uniqueness of Jesus in relation to God and his coming kingdom, in relation to the church, and in relation to the entire world of history and nature.

If we do not use these Christological titles as our linguistic access to the knowledge of Jesus' identity and meaning, then we shall have to find some other way of speaking about him, unless we are to remain silent. Who would we then say that he is, if he is not the one whom the earliest tests and traditions identify as the only true embodiment of God's word in history? Paul Knitter says that even though we strip away the Christological titles that declare the uniqueness of Jesus, he can still be vitally important to us Christians.¹⁵ But so can Buddha, so can many things. When William Hamilton a decade ago was proclaiming the death of God, he was still clinging to Jesus. When asked, "Why Jesus?" he answered, "I have a hang-up on Jesus." Similarly, when the authors of the *Myth of God Incarnate* rejected the dogma of the incarnation as an unacceptable myth, they acknowledged that although they would have to abandon the ontological equation of Jesus with God, they would still go on speaking of Jesus Christ "as if he were God for us"¹⁶ and use language that John Hick calls the "hyperbole of the heart."¹⁷ But there is an old word for speaking of a creature "as if he were God"—idolatry. One of the "Myth of God Incarnate" theologians announces that Jesus will "always be the unique focus of my perception of and response to God."¹⁸ But why Jesus? Who is he?

What is the essence of the uniqueness of Jesus? It does not lie in the fact that he was a historical individual who lived once upon a time in Palestine. Every one of us is a unique individual in the sense that none of us has a duplicate. I am the one who lives inside my skin at this time and place. But the uniqueness of Jesus is *sui generis*. He died as a unique historical individual at one time and place, under Pontius Pilate just outside the gate, but he was raised to be

the living presence of God in every new age and every strange place. The issue of Jesus' uniqueness finally has to do with the resurrection. "God raised him to life again, setting him free from the pangs of death" (Acts 2:24).

When we confess the uniqueness of Jesus, we do not mean merely that he was a concrete individual man, which he was. We mean that he is the concrete embodiment of universal meaning. The true identity of Jesus was revealed to his disciples only after the resurrection, or at least only then could they begin to understand what he had been disclosing step by step along the way. If we could turn back the reel of history to the days before Easter, if we could only find some tapes or pictures of the man Jesus, if we could read the obituaries that appeared in the *Galilean Gazette*, I don't believe that we would gain a deeper insight into the true identity of Jesus. The true identity of Jesus is something which in the last analysis "flesh and blood" cannot reveal to us. More historical information will not solve the riddle of Jesus' personal identity. If a person looks into the abundant texts and traditions of the Christian past and concludes that Jesus is not the one they say he is, that person may invent other names and labels to transfer to Jesus, but in doing so the person is not adding to the fund of our knowledge about the historical Jesus, but only telling the world where he or she personally stands in relation to him. For the Christological titles that the apostles applied to Jesus were not broadcast on an objective screen of history. They were born in the struggles of following Jesus,¹⁹ of preaching the kerygma of his cross and resurrection, and taking the gospel to the Gentiles. A Christological title is a dialectical statement that lives in the polar tension between subject and object. It says something about Jesus but also about the person making the confession. No one can call Jesus "Lord" except he has been grasped by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:3). The statement is not a product of objectifying analysis. Peter's confession, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God," was an ecstatic statement—a miracle of the mind (Tillich).

The true identity of Jesus can be acknowledged only by faith in him as the risen Lord and the living Christ. We do not

expect that anyone will confess the uniqueness of Jesus in the special sense implied by the sum of the Christological titles by means of a historiographical reconstruction of the historical Jesus. That Jesus is dead and buried and will always remain sealed in the tomb to people who do not believe that he now lives freely beyond the limits of his own earthly fate.

III. The Universality of Jesus Christ

The uniqueness of Jesus belongs to the core of the Christian gospel. What is unique about Jesus, however, is precisely his universal meaning. This particular and concrete man, Jesus of Nazareth, is unique because of his universal significance. His uniqueness lies in his universality. If Jesus is the Savior, he is the universal Savior. I cannot confine him to being my personal Savior, merely the focus of my own experience of God.

We are back to the beginning. If Jesus is the unique and universal Savior, how can there be a dialogue with other religions? Are not Christians bound to say that theirs is the only way of salvation, that non-Christians will be saved either by being evangelized here and now or by some loophole or other? We seem to be confronted with a dilemma. If Jesus is the unique and universal Savior, there is no salvation in the non-Christian religions. If there is salvation in the non-Christian religions, then Jesus is not the unique and universal Savior. Theology is facing this dilemma.

Christians should not be afraid of dialogue with other religions. The religions are part of the universal context in which the true identity of Jesus must find new expression. The Christological titles did not descend upon Jesus all at once and ready-made. There was a development in which new titles were discovered for Jesus in the hermeneutical process of transmitting the traditional texts within the horizon of new contexts. Every Christological title had to be born again in history in the process of encountering the story of Jesus in a new religious context. We do not yet fully know how we shall confess Jesus in the future of the dialogue with other religions. We shall continue to confess him in the language of

our familiar texts and traditions. But the universality of Jesus means that he will live in the medium of symbols that may still seem strange to us. Churches and theologians are calling us to a new dialogue with the world religions. I do not have the benefit of personal involvement in any high-level, disciplined, and challenging dialogue with representatives of other religions. What we say now is part of our homework for a task that lies before us. Our churches and theologians are generally not prepared for such a dialogue. I do not want the church of which I am a part to be represented by a theology that has already abandoned the heart of the Christian gospel. We cannot accept the rules of a dialogue that require us to remain silent about what lies at the core of our movement. It is therefore very urgent that we know what we mean by the uniqueness and universality of Jesus Christ.

We have spoken about the uniqueness of Jesus, guided by the import of the major Christological titles applied to him after Easter. But how shall we understand the universality of Jesus?

Christians believe in the universality of salvation in Jesus' name. It is God's will that all people shall be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth (2 Tim. 2:4). Evangelicals generally accept universal salvation in this sense, as valid in principle for everyone. But they restrict salvation in the end to those who actually hear the gospel and put their faith in Christ.²⁰ Under this restriction the rift that has been opened up in the world through sin will widen to an eternal chasm, splitting the one world of God's creation into two unreconcilable halves, only God's half will be much smaller than the devil's, in fact, only a remnant of the whole. There is not much for the angels to sing about if the evangelicals get what they expect—a heaven sparsely filled with only card-carrying Christians.

Biblical universalism transcends the particularist eschatology of the evangelicals. There are stern warnings in the New Testament threatening eternal perdition. There are reservations; there are qualifications of the universal hope. But these are addressed more to those inside with apparently the right credentials than those outside. "This people honors me

with their lips, but their heart is far from me" (Mt. 15:8; Mk. 7:6). "It is not those who say to me, 'Lord, Lord,' who will enter the kingdom of heaven" (Mt. 7:21). The New Testament warns of the spiritual danger of using the right evangelical words and ecclesiastical doctrines as the basis of trust and hope. There is spiritual danger in reducing the power and future of the universal Christ to the pinhole size of the believer's faith or the church's confession here and now.

New Testament universalism, however, is always a predicate of the uniqueness of Jesus Christ, not a metaphysical attribute of the world in process (as in the Origenistic doctrine of *apokatastasis ton panton*), or of a saving potential inherent in the world religions, or of an existential possibility universally available to every person in a moment of decision. The uniqueness Christians claim for Jesus as World-Savior lies in the revelation of his eschatological identity constituted by his resurrection victory over death as the "last enemy" of humankind. The uniqueness of Jesus is not a function of our Christian *blik*. It belongs to him by virtue of his enthronement as the Lord of the coming kingdom. A particularist eschatology can be constructed only by picking particular passages, and choosing to ignore others. What about the universalist thrust in the Pauline theology? "Just as all men die in Adam, so will all be brought to life in Christ" (1 Cor. 15:22). "For in him [Christ] all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross" (Col. 1:19-20). "For he has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of his will, according to his purpose which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things in earth" (Eph. 1:9-10). "That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:10-11). "When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things under him, that God may be everything to every one" (1 Cor. 15:28). Here we have the core of the kind of eschatological

panentheism that has sparked the imagination of Wolfhart Pannenberg and others. "And he is the expiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world" (1 John 2:2). We cannot take time for an exegesis of these passages. But I have piled verse upon verse to create a total impression of the universalizing tendencies in these passages.

The evangelicals ignore anything that smacks of a universal eschatology, preferring instead to hold a monopoly for Christians on the salvation which God in Christ has accomplished for the world, converting their believing in Christ or their belonging to the church into a meritorious thing that earns salvation and insures against damnation.²¹ For a long time I was taught some version of this self-centered and vindictive eschatology, but I cannot remember ever literally believing the Christ-diminishing implication that in the end all the bad news piling up against the world would win out against the good news that dawned for the world on the morning of Easter.

In the strength of the Christian belief in the uniqueness and universality of Jesus Christ, it is imperative that Christians cheerfully enter into every arena of witness and dialogue with people of other faiths. "For he who is not against us is on our side" (Lk. 9:50). But what shall we expect to find in a dialogue with other religions? We have encountered the view of Knitter and Hick that there is salvation without Christ in the other religions, and therefore not only outside the church, not only apart from faith in Christ, but also apart from Christ altogether. The coming of Christ is not necessary for the salvation of humanity. They do not deny that there is salvation in Christ for Christians, but they do abandon the hope of the world's salvation in Christ alone as a chauvinistic doctrine, and along with it, of course, the Christological premise of the uniqueness and universality of Jesus which supports the hope.

The teaching that there is salvation in the other religions is spreading in the churches. No doubt, Rahner's influence is the major force on the Catholic side, and perhaps the process theologians are the dominant school on the Protestant side, since they operate with a purely representative view of salva-

tion in Christ.²² According to this view salvation does not happen for the world on account of Christ; it is only *represented* in a decisively clear way, although I have failed to find anything decisive or clear in Process Christology.

Christian theologians are debating the question whether or not there is salvation in other religions, and taking sides on the issue, without first making clear the model of salvation they have in mind. If a prospector says, "There is gold in those hills," he must know the difference between gold and the other metals. What is the salvation that theologians expect to find or not to find in other religions? Most of the debate so far has taken us nowhere, because vastly different things are meant by salvation. If salvation is whatever you call it, there is no reason for a Christian to deny that there is salvation in other religions. We may speak of salvation on two levels, *phenomenologically* and *theologically*. On a purely *phenomenological* level, there are numerous models of salvation and there are ways of delivering each of the models and making them work. When the nomads needed a land for their salvation, they were promised a land by their God, and they got it, and have suffered ever since. When the slaves in Egypt needed deliverance from oppression for their salvation, God called Moses to lead the exodus out of Egypt. When the wandering people of God needed food for their salvation from hunger, God supplied them with daily manna from above. And the history of salvation went on, creating different models for its expression, but always pointing forward to new dimensions generated by the experience of fundamental lack. Land is needed, but it's not enough. Freedom is needed, but it's not enough. Food is needed, but it's not enough.

If we are told there is salvation in the other religions, there is no *a priori* reason to deny it. It depends on what is meant by salvation. If salvation is the experience of illumination, then Buddha can save. I say this cautiously, because I stand on this side of the dialogue. If salvation is the experience of union with God, then Hinduism can save. If salvation is being true to the ancestors, then Shintoism can save. If salvation is revolution against the overlords and equality for

the people, then Maoism can save. If salvation is liberation from poverty and oppression, then Marxism can save. If salvation is psychological health, there is salvation not only outside the church but outside the religions as well. If salvation is striving for humanization, for development, for wholeness, for justice, for peace, for freedom, for the whole earth, for what not, there is salvation in the other religions, in the quasi-religions, and in the secular ideologies. The reason Christians are confused and have appeared so smug about salvation is that they imagined they held a monopoly on salvation. Then when they have discovered virtues and values that match or excel what they find among Christians, they are prepared to accept the doctrine of salvation in non-Christian religions, perhaps even to the point of surrendering every version of the *sola Christi*. So we have moved from salvation available exclusively in a Christian specialty store to a veritable supermarket of salvation whose shelves are stacked with man-made substitutes at inflationary prices, packaged for cosmetic appeal and convenient consumption.

On a theological level salvation is not whatever you want to call it, the fulfillment of every need or the compensation for every lack. I do not deny that we may also speak of salvation in this extended phenomenological sense, with the warning that it has generated much of the confusion in which our topic languishes. Salvation in the Bible is a promise that God offers the world on the horizon of our expectation of personal and universal death. The gospel is the power of God unto salvation because it promises to break open the vicious cycle of death. Death is the power that draws every living thing into its circle. Here I cannot enter into the mystery of death. But if anyone denies the reality of death and its power to insinuate itself as the eschaton of all life, threatening the very conditions of the possibility of meaningful existence, I would take a patient "wait and see" attitude. It is just a question of time before death will punctuate everybody's personal story with its own annihilating force. We cannot derive a final meaning for life on this side of death. We can gain the partial salvation we are willing to pay for, but none of these techniques of salvation can succeed in buying off death.

Salvation in the New Testament is what God has done to death in the resurrection of Jesus. Salvation is what happens to you and me and the whole world in spite of death, if the resurrection of Jesus means what the apostolic kerygma and the catholic dogma have interpreted it to mean. The story of salvation is a drama of death and resurrection, whatever other human personal and social problems the word might trade on. The gospel is the announcement that in one man's history death is no longer the eschaton, but was only the second to last thing. It has now become past history. Death lies behind Jesus, qualifying him to lead the procession from death unto new life. Since death is what separates the person from God in the end, only that power which transcends death can liberate the person for eternal life with God. This is the meaning of salvation in the biblical Christian sense. It is eschatological salvation, because the God who raised Jesus from the dead has overcome death as the final eschaton of life. Our final salvation lies in the eschatological future when our own death will be put behind us. This does not mean that there is no salvation in the present, no realized aspect of salvation. It means that the salvation we enjoy now is like borrowing from the future, living now as though our future could already be practiced in the present, because of our union with the risen Christ through faith and hope.

Theologians who speak of salvation in the non-Christian religions should tell us if it is the same salvation that God has promised the world by raising Jesus from the dead. The resurrection gospel is the criterion of the meaning of salvation in the New Testament sense. When Christians enter into dialogue with persons of other religions, they must do their utmost to communicate what they mean by the assertion that Jesus lives and explain how this gospel intersects the hopes and fears of every person whose fate is to anticipate death as the final eschaton. If the dialogue shows that other religions are not much moved by the problem of death, that the problem of death is limited to a particular way of viewing the human predicament, we would have to say that the encounter with Christianity itself becomes the occasion for everyone to see that the problem of death arises out of the structure of

existence itself. The gospel falls upon the human situation and illuminates the universal existential problem. This is the hypothesis that Christians bring into an interreligious dialogue. A Christology that is silent about the resurrection of Jesus from the dead is not worthy of the Christian name and should not be called Christology at all.

The new challenge to Christology is to speak of the identity of Jesus Christ in the context of the world religions and secular culture. In the past, theology has dealt with the religions from afar, giving us a Christian interpretation of the non-Christian religions from a ready-made theological point of view. In a sense this is all we can do prior to the event of dialogue. But if we really believe that the uniqueness of Jesus lies in his universality, that his identity is always being mediated through the concrete events of history, then we should be open to exploring what the non-Christian religions can contribute to our understanding of the universal identity of Jesus Christ. The history of the religions once contributed all the Christological titles to the interpretation of the Jesus-event. Some of them were rooted in the ancient Hebrew traditions, others not, but all of them were transformed in the process of being assimilated into the traditions about Jesus. That process is still going on in the openness of world history, engendered by the universal missionary witness to Jesus as the Christ, the Lord and Savior of the world.

I asked one of my African graduate students, "If you were to appropriate a religious symbol of highest significance from the framework of traditional African religious experience, what would you call Jesus?"

His answer was "The ancestor."

I responded, "In the past the missionary told you what you should or should not say, repeating the texts and traditions of his own religious context. But now you must decide for yourself whether it is appropriate to call Jesus the ancestor, whether that would be faithful to the biblical text and relevant to the African context. I don't know." Then I muttered something about, "Before Abraham was, I am," not really knowing what it might mean today.

The identity of Jesus cannot be limited to the particular

Termo

contexts of our past. Christology is not static. New contexts have made it possible for new meanings to blossom on old texts. They relate to the concrete struggles of people for life, health, wholeness, fulfillment, salvation. In India Jesus is pictured by some as the Avatar. To us this means practically nothing, but in India possibly a great deal. In many parts of the Third World, Jesus is the liberator. Liberation has become the focal image of a whole new Christology. To us it may also mean something, but not exactly the same as to people suffering the conditions of poverty, exploitation, and oppression. In the patristic era Jesus was called the Logos, and that carried a metaphysical meaning quite different from the same word in the Gospel of John. In Nazi Germany, Martin Niemöller preached about Jesus as the true *Führer*. In the context of Western atheism and the trend to depersonalization in technological society, Dorothy Sölle has animated the theme of Jesus as the "representative." Similar titles, such as "advocate," "delegate," and "deputy," have been used to speak of the meaning of Jesus for modern people, and perhaps soon, if not already, someone in the Far East will suggest "chairman." Every culture has to ask of Jesus in its own way, "Are you the One who is to come, or do we look for another?" Every people will have to answer, "Who do you say that I am?" in a language they can understand. The crucifix of Jesus as a tortured Peruvian Indian on the cover of Gustavo Gutiérrez's book *Theology of Liberation* could not have been sculpted in another part of the world.

The point we have been making is that the exclusive uniqueness of Jesus, mediated by the texts and traditions that announce his resurrection as the living Lord, drives us to discover his universal significance, not in another world after this one, but in the real contexts of ongoing history. His true identity is still being disclosed in the encounter of the gospel with the world religions. It is not a case of the gospel meeting the world religions down a one-way street, laying on them the traditional symbols of Christology and receiving nothing back. The dialogue will be a two-way street, in which the condition of openness to the other religions will be motivated by a knowledge that they also somehow speak of Jesus Christ. The Old Testament is the paradigm case of how one

religion of another time and place can speak of Jesus Christ in a proleptic way. If the apostles and the church fathers could find anticipations of Christ in the Old Testament, we have a right to expect a similar thing in the texts and traditions of other religions. For God has not left himself without a witness in these religions.

We have steered a course between the Scylla of evangelicism without the universality of Jesus Christ and the Charybdis of universalism without the uniqueness of Jesus Christ. But ours is not essentially a middle position combining elements at random from the right and the left. Rather, the right and the left are splinters of a holistic vision of the eschatological Christ whose uniqueness lies in his concrete universality.²³ This universality is being worked out in the world mission of the church. The ultimate horizon of this historically mediated universality is hope for an eternal restitution of all things in God. We have a universal hope in Christ, not a universal gnosis. It is a hope that engenders the actions of witness and mission in history, not a knowledge that pretends to know the final outcome of things in advance. It is a hope that the Lord of the church will also finally rule as the Lord of the world, inclusive of all its religions.²⁴ Meanwhile, we can witness and work as though God is at work behind the backs of the plurality of world religions, pushing them forward into a final unity that has become proleptically incarnate for all in Jesus Christ. There are not two ways of salvation.²⁵ There is one salvation, one way of salvation, one Savior of the world, and that is the eschatological salvation valid for all through the one who came that all might find life, who died that the world might be reconciled, who raised that hope might live for the victory of God and the restitution of all things in him.

NOTES

1. Quoted in Robert L. Wilken, "The Making of a Phrase," *Dialog, A Journal of Theology* 12 (Summer 1973): 174.

2. John Hick, *God and the Universe of Faiths* (New York: Macmillan, 1973), pp. 121ff.

3. John Hick, "Jesus and the World Religions," in *The Myth of God Incarnate*, ed. John Hick (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1977), p. 179.
4. Paul F. Knitter, "A Critique of Hans Küng's *On Being a Christian*," *Horizons* 5, no. 2 (1978): 151-64.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 156.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 153.
7. *Ibid.*
8. *Ibid.*, p. 154.
9. J. D. Douglas, ed., *Let the Earth Hear His Voice*, (Minneapolis: World Wide Publications, 1975), p. 76.
10. See C. F. D. Moule, *The Origin of Christology* (London: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1977), and Willi Marxsen, *The Beginnings of Christology: A Study in Its Problems* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969). These two writings represent the right and the left in current New Testament scholarship dealing with the relation between the historical Jesus and Christology. Both lead us to the same conclusion: that attempt to construct a totally non-Christological interpretation of the historical Jesus proves itself to be a failure.
11. This was the judgment that Martin Kahler reached as early as 1892 in his book, *The So-Called Historical Jesus and the Historic Biblical Christ*, ed. Carl E. Bratten (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1964).
12. For an excellent summary of the current state of New Testament scholarship regarding the Christological titles, see Christoph Demke, *Die Einzigartigkeit Jesu* (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1976).
13. See Oscar Cullmann, *The Christology of the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1959), pp. 239-47.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 245.
15. Paul Knitter, *op. cit.*, pp. 153, 155.
16. Frances Young, "A Cloud of Witnesses," in *The Myth of God Incarnate*, *op. cit.*, p. 39.
17. John Hick, "Jesus and the World Religions," p. 183.
18. Frances Young, "A Cloud of Witnesses," p. 38.
19. The role of "following Jesus" in Christology has been recently stressed by Jon Sobrino in *Christology at the Crossroads* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1978).
20. See Harold Lindell, "Universalism," in *Let the Earth Hear His Voice*, *op. cit.*, pp. 1206-13.
21. Of course, no one holding such a view would acknowledge that granting such a causal role to faith and/or membership in the church could be regarded as "a meritorious thing that earns salvation."
22. See Schubert M. Ogden, "The Point of Christology," *Journal of Religion* 55, no. 4 (October 1975): 375-95; David Griffin, *A Process Christology* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1973); John Cobb, *Christ in a Pluralistic Age* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975).
23. Our point is that evangelical particularity and catholic universality are both inherent in the biblical picture of the historical Jesus of Nazareth as the resurrected Christ of God.
24. A Christocentric evangelical universalism is epistemologically a vision of hope generated by a living faith in an unconditionally loving God

who showed his invincible power by raising Jesus from the dead. See Robert William Jenson, *The Knowledge of Things Hoped For* (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1971).

25. The notion of two ways of salvation has been clearly proposed by H. R. Schlette, *Colloquium salutis—Christen und Nichtchristen heute* (Cologne, 1965); also "Einige Thesen zum Selbstverständnis der Theologie angesichts der Religionen," in *Gott in Welt II*, ed. J. B. Metz (Freiburg: Herder, 1964), pp. 306-16.

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Joseph Bustillos
MT 533: Theology of Religious Encounter
February 22, 1985

excellent

Essay Review: Shaking the Sleeping Beauty, by Michael Griffiths.

Micheal Griffith's lengthy treatment of the subject of Universalism is commendable but a bit disappointing. He takes a solid grip on his subject and refuses to let go until his point is made. The sad part about his efforts is that he leaves one half of the question unanswered, "What happens to those that die without an adequate knowledge of Jesus Christ?") ✓

He begins by pointing out the growing popularity Universalism is having. Next he presents what he calls the tenets of, or reason for Universalism. They are: 1) God is love and so there can be no hell, 2) Divine Sovereignty must mean universal salvation, 3) The Cross is effective for all, 4) Traditional Orthodox teaching on hell is immoral and repulsive, 5) Biblical descriptions of the Last Judgement and Hell are not describing objective reality, 6) God speaks through all religions to all people, 7) The Church has failed to reach all people, 8) Christian Ecumenism leads logically to Human Ecumenism, 9) There is a Second Chance after Death, 10) The Bible can be made to support the doctrine of Universalism. He then concludes this section with a brief note about the appeal of Universalism (which was more or less presented in the above tenets).

Next he presents the "Fatal weaknesses of Universalism." They are as follows: 1) It has a weak doctrine of Sin, 2) It has an easy concept of Salvation, 3) It offends the Logic of the Cross, 4) It offends the Freedom of Man's will, 5) It removes any urgency from Gospel preaching and missionary endeavour, 6) It ignores the Biblical stress on the decisiveness of this life and its decisions, 7) It condemns the preaching of Christ and his apostles as either inept or immoral.

He then concludes the essay by refuting the tenets one-by-one that were given in the first section. His responses to the tenets of Universalism basically falls into the category that they (those that hold to the doctrine of Universalism) have a poor understanding of the other concepts involved. A Biblically based understanding of the Nature of God and His soteriological invasion in history for mankind is very much lacking in the Universalist point of view.

Beyond the fact that he doesn't deal with the question of the destiny of the "legions of the ignorant," the other thing that bugged me about this article was his thinly veiled feelings about Christian organizations being involved in social-action. This was mentioned in class as being a part of his Brethren background showing through. //

His treatment of Universalism is extremely orderly and well drafted. Putting the tenets and refutation of the tenets together may have aided my understanding (structurally) of the article, but it also possible would have taken away the concise feel that the article presents.

Shaking the Sleeping Beauty

Arousing the church to its mission

taken from: THE CONFUSION OF THE CHURCH
ch. IV AND THE WORLD, pp. 115-143.

Michael Griffiths

Inter-Varsity Press

1980

Universalism

The underlying theology behind this confusion of the church and the world is the false teaching that ultimately the church and the world will be co-terminous and that nobody will be left outside the church. This doctrine is defined by C. H. Dodd as the belief that, 'as every human being lives under God's judgment, so every human being is ultimately destined in God's mercy to eternal life.'

Universalism is also defined in the *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* under the heading:

Apokatastasis. The Greek name for the doctrine that ultimately all free moral creatures – angels, men and devils – will share in the grace of salvation. It is to be found in Clement of Alexandria, in Origen and in St. Gregory of Nyssa. It was strongly attacked by St. Augustine of Hippo and formally condemned in the first anathema against Origenism, probably put out by the Council of Constantinople in AD 543. . . .¹⁰

Formal condemnation by the Catholic Church and difficulty in harmonizing it honestly with the teaching of Jesus have possibly prevented this view from being made more explicit.

¹⁰ Quoted by J. I. Packer in 'The Way of Salvation, Part III: The Problems of Universalism', *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 130, January 1973, pp. 3-11.

¹⁰ F. L. Cross (ed.), *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (OUP, 1958), p. 57.

More recently, Archbishop William Temple abandoned any and all ideas of hell.

Such concepts could not permanently remain in the minds of people who read the Gospels. Steadily the conviction has gained ground that the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ cannot be conceived as inflicting on any soul that He has made unending torment. . . . How can there be a paradise for any while there is a hell for some? Each supposedly damned soul was born into the world as a mother's child; and paradise there cannot be for her if her child is in such a hell.¹¹

Jim Packer writing on this subject says that 'whereas till recently its status was that of a discredited speculation, nowadays it is widely regarded as belonging to orthodoxy. Missionary leaders and major theologians, both Catholic and Protestant, assert more or less explicitly that all will be saved, or at least that the question of their salvation should be left open with the scales of expectation tilted in the universalist direction. . . .'¹²

And in a footnote he adds that 'The names of William Temple, C. H. Dodd, C. Raven, H. H. Farmer, John Hick, John Baillie, N. Berdyaev, C. F. D. Moule, Karl Barth, W. Michaelis, Hans Küng, may be cited as samples to illustrate the assertion in the text.'

Missionary advocates of universalism

This 'Trojan Horse' has gained entrance into Christendom and threatens to destroy missionary motives and hinder the effectiveness of Christ's soldiers and their readiness to continue the battle . . . perhaps there is no battle! The church militant is to be militant no longer! The effect of this doctrine upon missions can be seen from the following quotation:

The question of authority is immediately linked with the

¹¹ W. Temple, 'The Idea of Immortality in Relation to Religion and Ethics' (Drew Lecture 1931, Independent Press, 1932).

¹² Packer, *art. cit.*, p. 4.

question of urgency. In the early years of the modern missionary movement, this urgency was stated in terms of a certainty that those who in this life did not accept Jesus as Saviour would be damned. People were going to hell and they must be given their chance to believe in Jesus Christ. The matter was urgent. This way of stating the urgency of the evangelistic task is *now impossible for most*. . . . May I make bold to say that in our Christian churches the problem of unfaith lies precisely here, that, having lost confidence in the ways in which we used to state the necessity for evangelism, we have now ceased to believe in that necessity. We still believe that it is necessary for us to evangelize, but we do not believe that it is necessary for them to be evangelized. When our preaching does not convert we are concerned that we have failed, but there is little sense of loss concerning those who will not hear and believe.¹³

To show how this problem has percolated missionary thinking let me quote two articles from the *International Review of Missions* (July 1958). Both of these articles came from 'missionary statesmen' and while the first article is apologetic, the second is a spirited defence of the doctrine of universalism. Douglas Webster writes as follows:

The most immediately powerful and straightforward missionary appeal today can be found with the Fundamentalist sects. Their impetus rests upon two ideas, sometimes fanatically and often exclusively grasped: hell and the Second Coming of our Lord. In former times both the Catholic and Protestant missions were motivated by fear of hell and all evangelical missions were inspired by the thought of hastening the Second Coming. We should not underestimate the appeal-potential of either of these notions. I remember as an undergraduate being most deeply moved by one of Amy Carmichael's books, *Things as they are*.

There follows the famous quotation where she pictures

¹³ D. T. Niles, *The Preacher's Calling to be Servant* (Lutterworth, 1959), pp.32-33.

blind people pouring into the abyss, while Christians sit making daisy chains, with too few missionaries to guard the precipice. Universalism denies there is any precipice and any abyss. Then Webster continues:

For myself I have to admit I still find this a very powerful picture. If we believe that men are going to burn eternally in hell unless they are converted to Christ before they die, there are many Christians who would go to all lengths to convert them. But the theological climate has changed. This is not to say that the doctrine of hell has been thrown overboard or that it is irrelevant to the Christian mission. It is some years now since Professor C. S. Lewis made hell respectable again, if one may put it like this. In any event the most formidable teaching about hell in the New Testament comes from the lips of our Lord Himself. We can neither ignore it nor reject it. But this is very different from believing that all the unconverted heathen perish everlastingly when they die. For most of us, this plank in the missionary appeal has forever been removed.¹⁴

In the second article H. D. Northfield helpfully distinguishes four groups of non-Christians: those who have wilfully rejected the gospel; those who have heard the gospel but not understood it; those who have so far had no opportunity to hear the gospel; and the vast majority who have lived and died without any opportunity of becoming acquainted with the gospel. It is with these 'legions of the ignorant' that the writer is concerned.

But it is not too audacious to lay down the following proposition: that no infernal condition into which man may plunge himself is beyond the divine reach and that the categories of human punitive justice do not, in any way, apply to such cases. Hence it would seem, as far as we can understand, that only a small proportion of mankind is doomed to final punishment or annihilation. Not even those who definitely reject

¹⁴ Douglas Webster, 'The Missionary Appeal Today', *IRM*, July 1958.

the grace of God are without hope, for so many of them 'know not what they do'.¹⁵

This view is also held by respected leaders in Third World churches:

God's patient waiting for the soul's repentance must in the end be surely more potent than the soul's reluctance to repent and turn to Him (2 Pet. 3:9). The harmony of the heavenly worship would be impaired if, out of a hundred in the sheepfold, there is one soul which continues to languish in Sheol or 'the lake of fire'.¹⁶

It is this viewpoint which appears to underlie the present swing away from soteriological concern to social concern. Indeed, it is precisely because many leaders in the World Council of Churches believe that God will save all men anyway that "salvation" has been given such a firm this-worldly orientation¹⁷ and evangelism often becomes simply irrelevant.

The tenets of universalism

There is a wide spectrum of differing positions which may be described as universalistic in varying degrees, and not all of the tenets suggested below are necessarily found in combination. However, these attitudes do tend to hang together in an attempt to produce a coherent theological position. The following sections contain quotations to illustrate the theological position under review.

1. GOD IS A GOD OF LOVE AND SO THERE CAN BE NO HELL

The argument stems from the belief that because God is a God of love either there can be no hell at all, or people

¹⁵ H. D. Northfield, 'The Legions of the Ignorant', *IRM*, July 1958, p.301.

¹⁶ Professor John S. Mbiti quoted in *LTEHHV*, p.1222.

¹⁷ N. T. Wright, 'Universalism and the World-Wide Community', *Churchman*, July-September 1975, p.204.

will not be permitted to stay there long. One example is enough:

A theology based on sovereign love will uncompromisingly stand for universal salvation. Anything less would be inconsistent with God's sovereignty and would impune God's love... If He is sovereign love, the question as to the outcome is completely closed. Love will win unconditional surrender from all that is not love, and God will rule everywhere and forever.¹⁸

2. DIVINE SOVEREIGNTY MUST MEAN UNIVERSAL SALVATION

The fact that God is love and God is sovereign must inevitably ensure that all men will be saved. John Hick, for instance, assumes at the outset the very thing he will later seek to prove, namely that 'the eventual attainment of man's highest good is guaranteed by God's sovereignty: he has made his human creatures for fellowship with himself and will eventually bring them to this high end'.¹⁹ There is a very attractive note of triumph in this so-called 'reformed universalism'. According to Romans 9 following, 'that is the final end of divine predestination and the ultimate triumph of divine will, that God coerces no-one and yet surrenders no-one, but wins them all. No-one will be forced, and even the stubborn heart will at length be overcome by the supreme revelation of the glory of God'.²⁰

Again, Emil Brunner, who is very honest about the lack of biblical evidence for universalism, points out that this view of sovereignty 'when pushed to logical extremes leads to a doctrine of dual predestination'.²¹

Pushed to the other extreme it leads to the doctrine of universalism. What are our options here? Do we have to

¹⁸ Nels Ferré, *The Christian Understanding of God* (Harper, 1951).

¹⁹ John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love* (Fontana, 1968), p.17.

²⁰ Ethelbert Stauffer, *Theology of the New Testament*, (SCM Press, 1955), p.231.

²¹ E. Brunner, *Eternal Hope* (ET, Lutterworth, 1954), p.181.

choose between the doctrine of universalism on the one hand and the doctrine of particular redemption (that Christ died only for the elect) on the other? Tillich expresses the conflict:

It presupposes an idea of predestination which actually excludes most human beings from eternal salvation and gives hope for salvation only to the few – comparatively few, even if it is millions – who are actually reached by the message of Jesus as the Christ. Such an idea is unworthy of the glory and the love of God and must be rejected in the name of the true relationship of God to his world.²²

Does the stress on sovereignty force us to choose between universalism and hyper-Calvinism?

3. THE CROSS IS EFFECTIVE FOR ALL

'Reconciliation theology' is common today. Basically it claims that 'God has already won a mighty redemption . . . for the entire world . . . The task of the church is to tell all men . . . that they 'already belong' to Christ. . . . Men are no longer lost.'²³ For its adherents, the message is this:

I keep always in the foreground of my thought the fact that all those to whom I am privileged to speak about my Lord are already one with me in his saving ministry. I believe and confess him, they do not, and yet the essential facts of the gospel remain true for them as for me. God made us, God loves us, Jesus died for us, our trespasses are not counted, when we die we shall go to him who will be our judge. These affirmations are true of all men whether they know him or not, like them or not, accept them or not.²⁴

²² Paul Tillich, 'Mission and World History' in G. H. Anderson (ed.), *The Theology of the Christian Mission* (SCM Press, 1961), p.284.

²³ Dr Jitsuo Morikwa, Secretary of Evangelism of the American Baptist Convention.

²⁴ D. T. Niles, *Upon the Earth* (Lutterworth, 1962).

Critics of the view, however, are rather less euphoric in their appraisal of the teaching:

The mission of the church is to announce to all men that their sins have already been forgiven, that their salvation has been accomplished by Christ's death, and that all they need to do is to accept forgiveness and salvation as the free gift of God. This makes it sound as if salvation could be had almost automatically. Evangelism then consists of informing people that they have already been saved, and of trying to persuade them to accept that notion.²⁵

4. TRADITIONAL ORTHODOX TEACHING ON HELL IS IMMORAL AND REPULSIVE

There is a tendency here to caricature the full biblical picture and to present it as a chamber of horrors symbolizing eternal evil, a concentration camp in the midst of a blissful countryside, or as a heaven dependent upon other people not getting there. All of these criticisms are based on the 'equal and opposite' idea of hell,²⁶ whereas C. S. Lewis' view of hell as a minute place of shadows would seem more acceptable to tender consciences.²⁷ This 'aunt sally' about a repugnant view of hell is constantly being put up and knocked down. For the universalist, any morally sensitive and mature person must reject the idea of hell as being both sub-justice and sub-love. Indeed, 'that such a doctrine could be conceived, not to mention believed, shows how far from any understanding of the love of God many people once were and alas, still are.'²⁸ Even for those who can accept any idea of judgment, hell is real but temporary; a place where unbelievers can be

²⁵ Ilion T. Jones, 'Is Protestant Christianity being sabotaged from within?' *Christianity Today*, January, 1966.

²⁶ Cf. N. T. Wright, *art. cit.*, p.201.

²⁷ Cf. C. S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce* (Fontana, 1971).

²⁸ Nels Ferré, *The Atonement and Mission* (London Missionary Society, 1960).

brought to their senses. Hell does for unbelievers what in Roman theory purgatory does for believers.

5. BIBLICAL DESCRIPTIONS OF THE LAST JUDGMENT AND HELL ARE NOT DESCRIBING OBJECTIVE REALITY

In biblical eschatology such descriptions are related to facts only as a scientific formula or a model of an atom may be related to the real thing. They are not literal accounts of what will happen. What this boils down to is that biblical statements about judgment and hell are a kind of colourful threat, expressed in the only terms an intellectually and morally primitive kind of man can understand, in order to enable him to make the right decision about following God. The implication is that for modern man, in these more enlightened days, such colourful language is not required and that men will decide for God and heaven from more altruistic motives!

6. GOD SPEAKS THROUGH ALL RELIGIONS TO ALL PEOPLE

At the Nairobi assembly of the World Council of Churches in 1975 there was reference to 'the common search of people of various faiths, cultures and ideologies'. Universalism claims that God is too great and too noble to reveal himself in a single once-for-all revelation – God speaks in an infinite variety of ways through his common grace to mankind. 'Religion is essential to all and is God's call to his people. . . . There can no more be a Hindu, a Christian, or a Bahai medicine of immortality than there can be a Chinese, Aryan or Indian cure for cancer.'²⁹

7. THE CHURCH HAS FAILED TO REACH ALL PEOPLE

Here, if we can sympathize with little else, we can share in the view expressed. Are people to be condemned because we missionaries have been slothful in our language study? Are people to perish everlastingly

²⁹ Nels Ferré.

because our exposition of the glories of the gospel has been inadequate or unattractive, or because we have failed to disentangle Christianity from Western culture? Humility makes us all shrink from that. Universalism measures the slow progress of missionary evangelism against an exploding world population – pagan populations are increasing at a geometric ratio. If the church is failing, then a loving, sovereign God must have another plan, the reasoning runs.

But this tenet of universalism contradicts some of the others. Why does a loving, sovereign God not stir up or revive the church so that it will effectively reach all people with the gospel? None the less this problem is one with which we must grapple. The powerlessness of the ecumenical 'gospel' in evangelism and church growth may lead them to excuse the people to whom they fail to preach. But all of us are faced with the agony of failing to communicate to non-Christians, so that the issue is a real one.

8. CHRISTIAN ECUMENISM LEADS LOGICALLY TO HUMAN ECUMENISM

The traditional emphasis of the WCC on the unity of the churches has largely given way to a concern about justice and liberation within humanity as a whole.

The great issue of the hour is not Christian ecumenism but human ecumenism. Laudable as are the efforts of the World Council of Churches to bring some measure of understanding and charity into the relations of non-Roman Christian groups, the greater issue is practically untouched by that organization – namely, how to enter into a significant and mutually rewarding dialogue with the Asian faiths that are now beginning to show fresh life.³⁰

Christians understand community on the basis of God's deal-

³⁰ Floyd H. Ross, 'The Christian Mission in Larger Dimension' in G. H. Anderson (ed.), *The Theology of the Christian Mission* (SCM Press, 1961).

ing with humanity in Jesus Christ. The Son of God, we believe, has assumed humanity on behalf of all people of all ages and cultures, and both authenticates and answers the basic human need for community. In him, God's love and purpose for salvation extend to all the corners of the earth.³¹

It can be seen very clearly that this identification of the church with the world and its universalistic assumptions lies behind all the WCC's enthusiasm for changing the structures of society and giving financial aid to buy arms for bloody revolution, massacre, atrocities, etc.

9. THERE IS A SECOND CHANCE AFTER DEATH

Here the argument is two-fold. First, that although the New Testament emphasizes the urgency of a decision for Christ here and now, it does not make death the great dividing line. And secondly, that to deny the possibility of salvation after death is to imply a limit and defect both in God's love and his power. There must therefore be some form of 'post mortem' encounter with Christ.

That the Bible mentions various forms of judgment after death is not disputed, but advocates of this position argue that this is remedial not punitive, leading more to a temporary purgatory than an eternal hell. The basic idea is that nobody is in hell because God wants them to be there, but of their own personal choice and that as soon as they repent and believe they may leave whenever they like. Whether there is any ground in Scripture for a belief of this kind is, of course, very much open to question. Again, if God's sovereign ability to call men effectually after death is posited, we have to ask why, if God wills to call them at all, he does not do it here. The speculative character of these arguments is obvious.

³¹ *Jesus Christ Frees and Unites*, report from the Nairobi World Council of Churches, 1975, notes for Section 3.

10. THE BIBLE CAN BE MADE TO SUPPORT THE DOCTRINE OF UNIVERSALISM

This interpretation of Scripture must do two things. First, it must present those verses in the Bible which are capable of a universalistic interpretation and, secondly, it must provide an alternative explanation for, or demolish in other ways, those verses of Scripture which appear clearly to teach an ultimate and eternal division.

a. *Verses capable of a universalistic interpretation* fall into three main groups:

- i. *Verses held to teach that the cross ensures universal salvation*
 '... One died for *all*, therefore all died' (2 Cor. 5:14),
 '... God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself' (2 Cor. 5:19).
 '... Through Him to reconcile *all things* to Himself' (Col. 1:20).
 '... The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to *all men*' (Tit. 2:11).
 '... By the grace of God He might taste death for *every one*' (Heb. 2:9).
 '... Not for ours only, but also for those of the *whole world*' (1 Jn. 2:2).
- ii. *Verses held to teach that God intends universal salvation*
 '... *All flesh* shall see the salvation of God' (Lk. 3:6).
 '... Who desires *all men* to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth' (1 Tim. 2:4).
 '... Not wishing for any to perish but for *all* to come to repentance' (2 Pet. 3:9).
- iii. *Verses held explicitly to predict universal salvation*
 '... I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw *all men* to Myself' (Jn. 12:32).
 '... The times of restoration (*apokatastasis*) of *all things*' (Acts 3:21).
 '... Through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to *all men*' (Rom. 5:18).
 '... For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ *all*

shall be made alive . . . then comes the end . . . when all things are subjected to Him' (1 Cor. 15:22-28).

' . . . That every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord' (Phil. 2:11).

' . . . we have fixed our hope on the living God, who is the Saviour of all men' (1 Tim. 4:10).

b. It is argued that the biblical expressions supporting the doctrine of eternal punishment are pictorial and not actual, that the word 'eternal' as in 'eternal fire' (Mt. 25:41) and 'eternal punishment' (Mt. 25:46), really means the fire and punishment of 'the age'. But, similarly, while the fire may not be quenched and the worm may not die (Mk. 9:48) it is fire which continues and not that which is consumed in it.

' . . . Until he should repay all that was owed him' (Mt. 18:34).

' . . . And that slave who knew his master's will . . . shall receive many lashes' (Lk. 12:47).

' . . . Until you have paid the very last cent' (Lk. 12:59).

'He is not the God of the dead, but of the living; for all live to Him' (Lk. 20:38).

These verses are all interpreted in favour of the universalistic position. The genuineness of the parable of Dives and Lazarus is questioned because a name appears in it, and this man Lazarus is found in Abraham's bosom, making it, so the argument goes, unlike any other parable of Jesus. Such an apologetic is necessary from a universalistic understanding because the parable implies a permanent separation which cannot be terminated by those who are suffering eternal torment. Equally clearly in this parable is the fact that death is made the point of no return.

The appeal of universalism

It cannot be denied that an assembly of arguments like those given above and such a powerful group of proof texts thrown in rapid succession are quite impressive. We argue, naturally, that universalists must not so expound

these texts as to make them repugnant to those we quote; but of course they too may ask that we refrain from expounding texts in favour of eternal punishment in such a way as to be repugnant to the verses quoted in favour of the universalistic position – the more so, they would argue, as their scriptural arguments are backed up by general propositions drawn from the doctrine of God, and an ingrained human sense of justice. It is certainly true that such arguments, based upon the character of God, the apparent injustice of infinite punishment for a finite offence, and the impossibility of mothers being able to enjoy heaven while their children are still in hell, all have some intrinsic appeal.

The fatal weaknesses of universalism

Despite its attractiveness, universalism has many inherent weaknesses that make its tenability as a Christian doctrine extremely dubious and as a teaching of Jesus impossible.³²

A theological position must be coherent. If it is not, then it should fail to gain our support. The adoption of universalism would seem to have the following consequences:

1. IT HAS A WEAK DOCTRINE OF SIN

There is no ultimate risk in the moral life. The wages of sin are at the most a temporary inconvenience rather than a danger of perdition. Judgment may be uncomfortable for a period but ultimate blessing is assured, however wicked the life lived. John Baillie says that universalism (which he espouses) must be stated in a form 'which does nothing to decrease the urgency of immediate repentance and which makes no promises to the procrastinating sinner. It is doubtful such a form of the doctrine has yet been found.'³³

³² J. Arthur Baird, *The Justice of God in the Teaching of Jesus* (SCM Press, 1963), p.230.

³³ John Baillie, *And the Life Everlasting* (OUP, 1934), p.245.

2. IT HAS AN EASY CONCEPT OF SALVATION

Salvation is not a matter of life and death but of 'sooner' or 'later'. There is no special urgency about entering salvation – there will always be plenty more chances later on.

3. IT OFFENDS THE LOGIC OF THE CROSS

If salvation is more a matter of convenience than a matter of life and death, the cross seems to lose its necessity and to be too drastic a remedy for such a situation.

4. IT OFFENDS THE FREEDOM OF MAN'S WILL

Baird pictures God 'dragging unrepentant sinners screaming into heaven' because men are 'doomed to be saved' (the title of a 19th century tract), whether they want to or not.³⁴ Many universalists would suggest that men finally respond to the love of God of their own free will. But what kind of free will is it which in the long run *must* choose bliss? Any appearance of genuine freedom to choose on earth is lost by 'third degree' applied in hell – clearly any sensible fellow will choose heaven.

5. IT REMOVES ANY URGENCY FROM GOSPEL PREACHING AND MISSIONARY ENDEAVOUR

If all men are to be saved in the end why bother to urge men to repent now? They will later in any case. Why bother to be converted oneself for that matter? But the urgency which has characterized missionary endeavour derives not merely from the fear of hell, but from the consciousness that to live even this life without Christ is to be condemned to an alienated, meaningless existence estranged from God.

³⁴ J. A. Baird, *op. cit.*, p.221.

6. IT IGNORES THE BIBLICAL STRESS ON THE DECISIVENESS OF THIS LIFE AND ITS DECISIONS

Why did Jesus warn the Jews that the issue of unbelief would be that they would die in their sins (John 8:21, 24)? . . . Why did he include in the story of Dives and Lazarus the detail about the great gulf fixed between those in joy and those in torment (Luke 16:26)? None of these statements is explicable save on the basis that, for better or for worse, the choices and commitments made in this life have abiding consequences for the life to come, and he who does not lay hold of life here will certainly not enjoy it hereafter.³⁵

7. IT CONDEMNS THE PREACHING OF CHRIST AND HIS APOSTLES AS EITHER INEPT OR IMMORAL

Again Packer expresses this much better than I can:

Evangelicals have sometimes been censured for preaching hell and the wrath to come, and counselling their hearers to flee from it, and so avoid a lost eternity. But Jesus and the apostles did the same! Now, if universalism is true, and the founders of Christianity did not know it, their preaching stands revealed as ignorant and incompetent; and if universalism is true, and they did know it, their preaching stands as a bluff, frightening people into the kingdom by holding before them unreal terrors.³⁶

The doctrine of universalism is a 'Trojan Horse': it may have a venerable pedigree (as a heresy) *but its aim is the overthrow of the church militant. Such an interpretation makes nonsense of a great deal of the New Testament.* Why did Paul and the other apostles go through such suffering in order to reach men and women with the gospel? Why were men willing to lay down their lives rather than recant and offer incense to the false gods of Rome? If pardon could have been obtained immediately on entrance into the other

³⁵ J. I. Packer, *art. cit.*, *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 130 (January 1973), p.13.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p.13.

world, where in any case they would have been joined shortly by their persecutors, it must all seem like a terrible mistake. But a doctrine which inevitably makes all the heroes and martyrs of the Christian church appear misguided is surely suspect.

Refutation of the tenets of universalism

1. GOD IS A GOD OF LOVE

This is perfectly true. But does it therefore follow that there can be no hell or no eternal punishment?

A good many false conclusions may be founded upon the phrase 'God is love'. For instance, one may say, 'God is love, and He will not allow sin with its terrible consequences to continue in the world' and yet sin is rampant everywhere. Again, 'God is love, and He will not allow wrong to triumph over right' and yet men have seen through all ages and in all places wrong openly victorious over right. Again, 'God is love, and He will not allow His creatures to suffer.' And yet from the beginning the whole creation has groaned in pain, waiting to be delivered.³⁷

While Northfield may argue that 'we cannot state what He will do or not do; save only that He, being the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, will love. The resources of such infinite love are infinite too',³⁸ this begs the whole question. Certainly *we* cannot state what God will do or not do, but we can state what *God* has stated he will do or not do. Christian integrity forbids us to state or suggest anything else. If God has told us what he will do – revealing his will to us in the Bible, given us for just this purpose – what folly it is to ignore what *God* has stated he *will* do, in favour of what *we* suppose he *might* do! We set aside what claims to be the Word of God, in favour of what we know to be the word of man. 'To foist attributes on God

³⁷ H. W. Frost, *The Spiritual Condition of the Heathen*, p.5.

³⁸ H. D. Northfield, *art. cit.*; *IRM*, July 1958, p.304.

– particularly such an attribute as the peculiarly modern notion of a love incompatible with sternness or serious judgment – is neither safe nor wise.³⁹

It is not as though a God of love has not already acted to deliver men and women from the penalty of hell and punishment.

In the long run the answer to all those who object to the doctrine of hell is itself a question: 'What are you asking God to do?' To wipe out their past sins and, at all costs, to give them a fresh start, smoothing every difficulty and offering every miraculous help? But He has done so, on Calvary. To forgive them? They will not be forgiven. To leave them alone? Alas, I am afraid that is what He does.⁴⁰

The co-existence of hell with the God of love would seem a moral necessity if man is to have freedom of choice. We know all too sadly even in human experience that love may be rejected and that a person may persist in wilful hatred and estrangement, even when it is not in his interests to do so. Human pride can keep a man in hell.

2. DIVINE SOVEREIGNTY

Those with an Arminian background, eager to argue that Calvary is sufficient for all, may find that in fleeing from universalism their only refuge is in the adoption of limited atonement (particular redemption), a step, however, which they fear would drive them to a doctrine of double predestination. It is a problem capable of no facile solution. The Christian mind must ever seek to wrestle to understand the revealed truth of God, yet at the same time to be able to recognize the limitations of human understanding. We take the Bible as our sufficient guide, believing what it says, neither more nor less. If we find there God's clear warnings that men may be lost, may perish, may be cast into outer darkness, into eternal fire

³⁹ N. T. Wright, *art. cit.*, *Churchman*, July–September 1975, p.201.

⁴⁰ C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (Fontana, 1940), p.116.

and eternal punishment, then, what right have we to overthrow what Christ has taught by philosophizing about matters which our minds cannot grasp? There is surely a difference between 'willing', in the sense of desiring all mankind to be saved, and 'decreeing' that all men should be saved or that some should be saved and some lost.⁴¹

3. THE CROSS IS EFFECTIVE FOR ALL

Michael Green points out that in 2 Corinthians 5:20, 'Paul beseeches his readers to be "reconciled with God", proof positive that their reconciliation, in our sense of that word, was not yet complete, although God had been in Christ *katallassōn* the world unto himself.'⁴² The reconciliation is not automatic; there are two parties to a reconciliation (as indicated in Article II of the Church of England which says 'Christ died to reconcile his Father to us'). God has been reconciled to us – in fact it was he who took these wonderful steps to effect this reconciliation through the Lord Jesus Christ – but now we have to exhort *men* to be reconciled to God. The cross is sufficient for all, but efficient only for those who will be reconciled and make the necessary response of repentance and faith. The constant emphasis of Scripture is that the gospel 'is the power of God for salvation to every one who *believes*' (Rom. 1:16). The power of Christ is like a locomotive full of power and ready to carry us forward. Man is powerless to move himself one inch toward heaven; the coupling of faith is essential if he is to be saved. 'He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already' (Jn. 3:18). The cross without faith is like a vaccine without a syringe.

⁴¹ See Edwin A. Blum, 'Shall you not surely die?' *Themelios*, January 1979.

⁴² E. M. B. Green, *The Meaning of Salvation* (Hodder, 1965), p.227.

4. THE DOCTRINE OF HELL IS IMMORAL AND REPULSIVE

It could be argued that sin also is repulsive, and that an arms merchant or slave dealer deserves a hell which is very repulsive indeed. But the chief question is: 'repulsive to whom?' Not to Jesus, who taught it so evidently. 'It would contradict the whole Gospel tradition about Jesus to refer to the severity of the later church, the conception – so odious to modern man – of an ultimate discrimination.'⁴³ We should notice that the only references to Gehenna and Hades in the New Testament are found on the lips of Jesus. The words are not used by any other New Testament speaker or writer (except for a poorly-attested reading for 'grave' in 1 Cor. 15:55). The only one who can speak with authority is one who has himself come down from heaven and who is the incarnate Son of God. It is significant that if we deny this doctrine we are denying a doctrine which was taught by Jesus himself. If we try to attribute this to the severity of the later church it is puzzling to know why that church made no such reference in other writings, but included it in the teaching of Jesus.

We are familiar with the idea that a 'definite choice' (e.g. of a life partner) may have pleasant or unpleasant consequences of considerable duration. Small choices which prove to be wrong may invite terrible consequences for many people, apparently out of all proportion to the original mistake. In this case an act of repentance and turning in faith to accept the Lord Jesus as Saviour brings eternal blessing (no-one objects to that!); and it does not seem unreasonable that the failure to take this step should also have eternal consequences. Surely wilful defiance of an eternal God is bound to bring eternal misery! What right has a finite intellect to question the infinite will of God?

⁴³ Emil Brunner, *Eternal Hope*, p.177.

5. BIBLICAL LANGUAGE DOES NOT EXPRESS OBJECTIVE REALITIES

So the Bible gives pictures of reality rather than reality itself. The semantic problem of expressing in human language that which falls outside human experience is humbly recognized; this, after all, is what a great deal of modern theological controversy is all about. There is a real problem in the use of human language to express divine truth. None the less biblical language has been given to us by God himself in order to convey meaning, and the words used do indicate reality.

Moreover, on some occasions Christ speaks in explanation of a parable or allegory (e.g. in the parable of the tares, when in explaining the significance of the tares Jesus speaks of coming realities). He does not use parabolic language in explaining parables. 'The Son of Man will send forth His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all stumbling blocks, and those who commit lawlessness, and will cast them into the furnace of fire; in that place there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth' (Mt. 13:41-42).

Unless we are to evacuate biblical words of all meaning (in which case we have no foundation for any faith or any theology at all) we must accept the words of our Lord Jesus Christ as meaning what they say. Consuming fire and outer darkness are comprehensible in their fearsomeness and dread.

6. GOD SPEAKS THROUGH ALL RELIGIONS TO ALL PEOPLE

This would not seem to be a fair statement of the Bible's teaching about other religions, which are seen variously as humanly devised imaginations (Rom. 1:21-23), worship of demons (1 Cor. 10:20), or worship of graven images, an abomination to the Lord, to be utterly detested and abhorred and burnt with fire (Dt. 7). The Old Tes-

tament attitude towards other religions was well known by our Lord Jesus, who never repudiated it.

It is repeatedly urged that as God is at work in history and in the world in general, so he is also at work in other religions.⁴⁴

More recently the idea of 'anonymous Christians' has been suggested by Karl Rahner. This is scarcely a biblical view of religion in either the Old or the New Testament and the concept has been very amusingly shot down by Hans Küng:

Does this solve the problem? Are the masses of the non-Christian religions really marching in to the holy Roman Church or is this going on only in the theologian's head? Anyway, in reality, they – Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, and all the others, who know quite well that they are 'anonymous' – remain outside. Nor have they any wish to be inside. . . . And it would be impossible to find anywhere in the world the sincere Jew, Muslim or atheist who would not regard the assertion that he is an 'anonymous' Christian as presumptuous. To bring the partner to the discussion into our own circle in this way closes the dialogue before it has even begun. This is a pseudo-solution which offers slight consolation. Is it possible to cure a society suffering from a decline in membership by declaring that even non-members are 'hidden' members? But what would Christians say if they were graciously recognized by Buddhists as 'anonymous' Buddhists?⁴⁵

The Jewish religion was given by revelation of the God of Christianity, yet Paul agonized for the salvation of his people. There is no trace of the notion that proselytization must be avoided and their religion respected. The Jews are told: 'Repent, and . . . be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ' (Acts 2:38); that there is salvation in no-one

⁴⁴ See, for example, the famous book by Raymond Panikkar, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism* (Darton, Longman & Todd, 1965).

⁴⁵ Hans Küng, *On being a Christian* (Collins, 1977), p.98.

else (Acts 4:12) and that 'through him everyone who believes is freed from all things, from which you could not be freed through the Law of Moses' (Acts 13:39). The Lord Jesus himself spoke to Jews about heaven and judgment.

When Paul arrived in Athens he regarded even the Athenians as ignorant idolaters. Philosophy could not save men who were facing judgment (Acts 17:31). Their multiplicity of altars was wrong (Acts 17:29) and the only hope of 'all men everywhere' was that they should repent (Acts 17:30).

It is impossible to find support in the New Testament for peaceful co-existence with other religions; there is only one revealed truth, found in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. How can Buddhism, which denies creation, the existence of evil and moral responsibility, peaceably co-exist with Christianity? How can Islam which also calls on the God of Abraham and expects Jesus to come in judgment, and yet denies the person and work of Christ, be seen as an equal with Christianity? Anyone who denies these truths is a false prophet.

Confusion between creation and redemption is fundamental to these current false views. It is fascinating in this context, therefore, to read the words of Paul Tillich, who is not normally regarded as theologically conservative!

Moreover, missions is not an attempt to unite the different religions. If this were the function of missions, a uniting point, or center, would have to exist. Then, however, *this* uniting center would be the center of history and the Christ would become 'decentralized'. He would no longer be the center; but the center would be that which is above him and also above Buddha, Mohammed and Confucius. The Christian Church would then be *one* religious group among others, but it would not be the agency of the kingdom of God, as we have described it and as it has always felt itself to be... Is Christianity the absolute religion? Is Christ the center of history? Is he the bringer of the New Being? Or are the other religions

of equal value and does each culture have its own proper religion? According to these ideas, Christianity belongs to the Western world and it should not interfere with the religious developments of the Eastern world. This, of course, would deny the claim that Jesus is the Christ, the bringer of the New Being. It would make this statement obsolete, because he who brings the New Being is not a relative figure but an absolute figure, an all-embracing figure.⁴⁶

We must accept the sincerity of the beliefs of others and we may recognize that as well as biblical Judaism almost in its totality there are aspects in the ethics of Buddhism and most certainly in the prayerfulness of Islam which we can deeply appreciate. But we cannot adopt the 'fruit salad' syncretistic approach which seems favoured by some. In an earlier chapter we have made it clear that the Western or Anglo-Saxon cultural accretions must be shed as the Christian faith becomes indigenous in each new culture. But the essential doctrinal core of Christian faith cannot be modified without it ceasing to be Christian.

7. THE FAILURE OF THE CHURCH TO REACH OTHERS

We confess this to our shame and wish that all Christian churches felt the same burden and concern to reach the unreached. But to argue that God's justice is in some way affected by the great numbers who remain untouched by the gospel is to beg the question. God is just whether he allows only one person or untold numbers the consequences of unbelief. The situation is tragic, but the principles remain unchanged.⁴⁷

We do not know if God has any alternative plan. We do not know on what basis people who have lived before Christ or before the message of Christ was brought to them may have any hope of salvation. Paul Tillich points out that 'many people, even today, are still living *before*

⁴⁶ Paul Tillich in *The Theology of the Christian Mission*, pp.284-285.

⁴⁷ H. W. Frost, *The Spiritual Condition of the Heathen*, p.5.

the event of Jesus as the Christ; others, those who have accepted Jesus as the Christ, are living *after* the center of history.⁴⁸

We know that God judged Sodom and Gomorrah, and had mercy on the people of Nineveh when they repented. We know that people like Melchizedek and the wise men appear in the Bible record almost out of the blue, while God speaks to and through men like Abimelech and Balaam. But there is too little here on which to build a doctrine of syncretism. What we do have is the command to make disciples of *all nations*; and we have the gospel to preach to them: a command to *all men* everywhere to repent (Acts 17); and we have the responsibility to teach them *all the things* which Christ taught us, and that includes the facts of judgment, heaven and hell (Mt. 28:20).

8. HUMAN ECUMENISM

The Bible repeatedly divides men into two categories, and the teaching of Jesus does this incessantly. The parables 'all express the thought of judgment', says Emil Brunner. Sheep and goats, tares and wheat, good fish and bad, fruitful and unfruitful, profitable and slothful, wise and foolish, the way to life and the way to destruction – what biblical grounds can be found for ultimately bringing together things which the Bible teaches will ultimately be separated?

In this century, however, exegesis has turned decisively against the universalist cure. Few would now doubt that many NT texts clearly teach a *final* division of mankind into saved and lost.⁴⁹

9. A SECOND CHANCE

It would be a relief to believe in this, and comforting to be able to say so at the funerals of unbelievers. But on

⁴⁸ Tillich, *art. cit.*, p. 283.

⁴⁹ Richard J. Bauckham, 'Universalism: a Historical Survey', *Themelios*, January 1979, p.52.

what authority? The whole idea is quite gratuitous and we have no right to make such unjustified additions to biblical revelation. What we know is what God has told us, and no more. If the Bible tells us that 'it is appointed for men to die once, and after this comes judgment' (Heb. 9:27) what right have we to add to this 'and after that release'? Quite apart from the results of teaching of this kind, as we have already seen, there is not a shred of evidence for it in the Bible. If God is sovereignly able to call men effectually after death, then one must ask why God does not call them effectually now?

10. THE BIBLICAL EVIDENCE

To examine all these texts thoroughly in their contexts would take far more space than is available here.⁵⁰ It is worth making some brief general observations, however.

a. 'All the texts admit of other explanations more germane to their context.'⁵¹

b. The word 'all' need not necessarily imply universality, but 'all of some sorts' and 'some of all sorts'. Thus, for example, Romans 10:11-13 and 11:32 show from their context that 'all' means all races and not necessarily all individuals. Green suggests in one instance: 'The writer may be attacking the exclusiveness of a proto-Gnostic heresy which was restricting salvation to a particular class.'⁵²

c. In New Testament Greek the word 'saviour' was used in the sense of 'preserver' or 'Lord Protector' as a title of the Roman emperors and the normal use of the word 'save' meant 'to make safe' or 'preserve'. This seems to be the usage in Philippians 3:20 with a comparison of the

⁵⁰ For this, we may see the relevant commentaries, E. M. B. Green's helpful examination of the texts in *The Meaning of Salvation*, J. I. Packer's treatment in his article in *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 130, January 1973, and most recently N. T. Wright's 'Towards a Biblical View of Universalism' in *Themelios*, January 1979, pp. 225-230.

⁵¹ Packer, *art. cit.*, p.7.

⁵² Green, *op. cit.*, p.229.

citizenship and 'protectorship' of Rome and of heaven. It would seem probable that 1 Timothy 2:3-4 and 4:10 have a similar meaning.

d. Many texts are accompanied by statements which can only mean that finally some do perish. To interpret these texts from a universalist perspective is 'to accuse New Testament writers, and indeed the Lord himself, of intellectual schizophrenia!'⁵³

e. It is a little amusing to notice the reliance placed upon texts from the pastoral epistles by those who otherwise contend that they represent a tradition later than primitive Christianity!

f. Wright comments that some advocates of universalism still attempt to argue their case from certain passages in the Pauline corpus. 'An odd inversion, this, of the old liberal position where Jesus was the teacher of heavenly truths and Paul the cross-grained dogmatic bigot.'⁵⁴ It is the 'hard sayings' of Jesus himself which warn most clearly of eternal punishment.

Emil Brunner in spite of his own universalistic leanings is very clear on the weakness of the biblical evidence, and speaks of

... the attempt to qualify all affirmations about the last judgment by making the latter an interim affair after which alone that which is truly ultimate will come. Hence the expressions by which the New Testament emphasizes apparently the finality of the last judgment and of the damnation of the reprobate are so interpreted as to impart to judgment the character of a transitional stage, of a pedagogic cleansing process. *Aiōnios* does not mean eternal, but only eschatological; the inextinguishable fire, the worm that dies not, the destruction, the second death, etc., all these quite unequivocal expressions in themselves are subjected to such a protracted process of exegetical chemistry that they lose the definiteness of their ultimate character. The means of this exegetical chem-

⁵³ Packer, *op. cit.*, p.7.

⁵⁴ N. T. Wright, 'Towards a Biblical View of Universalism', p.55.

istry do not stand the test of conscientious examination; we have here evasion rather than exegesis.⁵⁵

Wright further hammers this home when he says,

Of these objections the best known, and still the most powerful, is the presence in the Gospels – on the lips of Jesus himself – of sayings which leave no room whatsoever for the universalist position. The sheep and the goats, the separation of the rich man and Lazarus, the broad and narrow ways, the fate of those who cause little ones to stumble – these and many many more are clear and uncompromising.⁵⁶

The universalist, therefore, has to argue *either* that the biblical verses do not mean what they say, *or* that they do not preclude a second chance and a later opening of the gates of hell, *or* that they have an existential meaning calculated to bring the hearer to a sense of his need for decision! The teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ seems to be quite plain – men are continually warned of the perils of sin and consequent judgment, and urged to flee from destruction. If the sayings of Jesus are at least more or less correctly reported and if universalism is true, then we must condemn the preaching of Christ and his apostles as either inept or immoral, for

... if universalism is true, and the founders of Christianity did not know it, their preaching stands revealed as ignorant and incompetent; and if universalism is true, and they did know it, their preaching stands revealed as a bluff, frightening people into the kingdom by holding before them unreal terrors. I leave it to the universalists to choose which of these options to settle for.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Emil Brunner, *Eternal Hope*, p.183.

⁵⁶ N. T. Wright, 'World-Wide Community', p.202.

⁵⁷ Packer, *art. cit.*, p.10.

Conclusion

It looks then as though we must consider universalism to be a latter-day version of Satan's lie to Eve, 'Thou shalt not surely die'.³⁸ If universalism has already been condemned by the church, and if its conclusions are as damaging as has been suggested, then it must be resisted. Of course we gladly proclaim the wonder of God's loving-kindness, patience and mercy to us sinners, but we must at the same time declare the dread consequences of exercising our human freedom to refuse cleansing and new creation when God offers it to us in the gospel.

When we turn from the world and its idols to serve the living and the true God we are brought into the fellowship of his people, the church. If we escape God's judgment upon the world, it is by entering the ark of his church. We must not confuse God's concern for the world with his calling his church out of it (*ekklesia*). Any ecumenical attempt to effect a merger between the church and the world is to confuse what God distinguishes and to attempt vainly to unite what God is determined to divide.

Material for study

Douglas Webster, 'The Missionary Appeal Today', *IRM*, July 1958.

H. D. Northfield, 'The Legions of the Ignorant', *IRM*, July 1958.

N. T. Wright, 'Universalism and the World-Wide Community', *Churchman*, July - September 1975, vol. 89 No. 3.

Richard J. Bauckham, 'Universalism: a Historical Survey', *Themelios*, January 1979, Vol. 4 No. 2.

THE OLDER ISSUES



Continuity or Discontinuity ???

Hendrik Kraemer



**What is the Value of the Values
of the non-Christian Religions ???**

Robert E. Speer

Joseph Bustillos
MT 533: Theology of Religious Pluralism
February 15, 1985

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Essay Review: The Authority of the Faith: Continuity or Discontinuity, by A. Kraemer.

How does one comment on one of the classics of Christian Theology?¹ Kraemer's essay is divided between a response or clarification of his previous publication on the subject of an understanding of the relationship between Christianity and non-Christian religions and a cursory look at two classical Christian positions taken in reference to this subject.

In the opening paragraphs he takes to task those who have abused the maxim, "All truth is God's truth." This is spoken of in terms of "religious experience" being the hallmark of God's activity. Kraemer replies, "Religious experience or ideas are of course not absent from the Bible, and they are by no means unimportant, but in no sense whatever are they central."² He then attempts to sever the ties between the Christian Revelation and non-Christian religions as being in a progressive or evolutionary relationship. This is not to deny the human value or depth or meaningfulness of these faiths. But in terms of Divine Truth or Revelation they are expressions of "Unglaube."³ He makes quite a few good comments about the value of Comparative Religious Studies in respect to their granting us a clearer, more honest picture of non-Christian religions and our need to honestly deal with the intent of these religions (i.e., to not a present lop-sided picture of Christianity verses non-Christian religions). Also commendable is his call for honesty in acknowledging what could be called our ultimate presuppositions.

He decries Christian theologians who, in an effort to achieve objectivity, lose the center of their theological frame of reference, their relationship to Christ. While his logic is straight-forward (a cheer rises up from the Presuppositionalist's camp) it may also prove to be his theology's weakness (a cheer rises up from the Evidentialist's camp).

True to his Barthian roots, Kraemer extolls the revelation of Christ as foundational for human salvation. "But where is this revelation found today?" you ask. In the very human and somewhat fallible pages of the Holy Scriptures. And what's worse is that the whole thing depends, to an extent, on a person's incomplete and somewhat fallible understanding. While the intervention of the Spirit of God in the life and understanding changes this dismal picture into a . . . (dare I write) . . . a miracle, this picture may be just the gap that would rouse Kraemer's opponents to a skeptic refusal to trust in such an imperfect revelation. All things appear equal again and perfection vanishes from view in this imperfect world.

Actually, this paradox is livable if the equation is pushed more to the side of the Holy Spirit and less on the fallible

human side. Also, openly beginning with one's presuppositions is always better than pretending that they're not there.

His illustration using Clement and Barth (getting back to Pluralism) is insightful. Again, granting his presuppositions the Revelation of the Gospel in Jesus Christ silences every mouth and demands a submission to the Truth.

FOOTNOTES

¹It can be measured in terms of being only slightly less threatening than reviewing an article written by one's prof.

²Kraemer. The Authority of the Faith, p 2.

³Kraemer, p. 20.

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THE AUTHORITY OF THE FAITH

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THE AUTHORITY OF THE FAITH

CONTINUITY OR DISCONTINUITY

H. KRAEMER

IT is not my intention to answer in this place the critics of my book. That I will try to do in another place; though a reply to the criticisms levelled against the positions taken in my book would not be an unsuitable way of expressing myself in this paper. However, the criticisms, although they of course turn around some fundamental differences of opinion, are so varied that an adequate answer to them obviously would lead to many important sideways that can better be left untrodden in this contribution to the continuation of the discussion of the problem of how we have to think about the relation of the Christian revelation towards the religious experience of mankind.

* The main theses of my book in regard to this problem are as follows. The Christian revelation as the record of God's self-disclosing revelation in Jesus Christ, is absolutely *sui generis*. It is the story of God's sovereign redeeming acts having become decisively and finally manifest in Jesus Christ, the son of the Living God, in Whom God became flesh and revealed His grace and

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truth. I coined for this conception the term 'biblical realism' in order to express the idea that the Bible, the human and in many ways historically conditioned document of God's acts of revelation, consistently testifies to divine acts and plans in regard to the salvation of mankind and the world, and not to religious experience, or ideas. Religious experiences or ideas are of course not absent from the Bible, and they are by no means unimportant, but in no sense whatever are they central. What is central and fundamental in the Bible is the registerings describing and witnessing to God's creative and redemptive dealing with man and the world. The term 'biblical realism' has been criticised as being vague or unnecessary. Human terms which are to express the realities of the Christian revelation are but more or less clumsy endeavours to express what can only be inadequately rendered by our human concepts. Therefore I shall be grateful if anyone will offer a better term, provided it conveys more clearly and more adequately the idea that the Bible and its contents can only be understood when it is taken as the record of God's thoughts and acts in regard to mankind, and not as a tale about the pilgrimage of the human soul towards God, however moving a tale of that pilgrimage might be told by one who surveys the religious history of mankind.

The relation of the world of spiritual realities, spread out before us in biblical realism, towards the world which is manifested in the whole range of religious experience and striving is not that of continuity, but of discontinuity. Theologically speaking, 'nature,' 'reason' and 'history' do not, if we want to think stringently, afford preambles, avenues or lines of develop-

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ment towards the realm of grace and truth as manifest in Jesus Christ. There are, to be sure, longings and apprehensions in the religious life of mankind outside the special sphere of the Christian revelation, of which Christ, what He is and has brought, may be termed in a certain sense the fulfilment. Yet, it is mistaken and misleading to describe the religious pilgrimage of mankind as a preparation or a leading up to a so-called consummation or fulfilment in Christ. I did not make this statement in my book because the only way to maintain strongly that the Christian revelation contains the one way of truth is to isolate it entirely from the whole range of human religious life. Nor is this statement inspired by any desire to minimise or despise the value and significance of much that stirs us in the religious quest of the various peoples. It simply follows from respect for the facts. These facts clearly teach us two things of crucial importance. First: even when we recognise that Christ may in a certain sense be called the fulfilment of some deep and persistent longings and apprehensions that everywhere in history manifest themselves in the race, this fulfilment, when we subject the facts to a close scrutiny, never represents the perfecting of what has been before. In this fulfilment is contained a radical recasting of values, because these longings and apprehensions when exposed to the searching and revolutionary light of Christ, appear to be blind and misdirected. That does not detract in the least from the fact that these longings and apprehensions, humanly speaking, are heart-stirring and noble, but if we want to be loyal to the divine reality that has come to us in Jesus Christ, this appreciation, which is simply a matter

of justice and honesty in the human plane, must not obscure our eyes to the truth that in Christ all things become new, because He is the crisis of all religions. In this we recognise that God as He is revealed in Jesus Christ is *contrary* to the sublimest pictures we made of Him before we knew of Him in Jesus Christ. If the word 'reconciliation' has not merely become an edifying term, readily used (or rather blasphemously abused) because it appears to be a rather successful instrument of arousing a sentiment of numinous awe; if the pronouncement that God was reconciling the world in Jesus Christ to Himself belongs to the core of the Gospel, we cannot escape the conclusion that somehow mankind in its totality is in a state of hostility towards God as He *really is*.

This fundamental discontinuity of the world of spiritual reality, embodied in the revelation in Christ, to the whole range of human religion, *excludes* the possibility and legitimacy of a *theologia naturalis* in the sense of a science of God and man, conceived as an imperfect form of revelation, introductory to the world of divine grace in Christ. This rejection of a *theologia naturalis* as affording the basic religious truths on which the realm of the Christian revelation rises as the fitting superstructure, does not, however, *include* denying that God has been working in the minds of men outside the sphere of the Christian revelation and that there have been, and may be now, acceptable men of faith who live under the sway of non-Christian religions—products; however, not of these non-Christian religions but of the mysterious workings of God's spirit. God forbid that we mortal men should be so irreverent as to dispose of how and where the Sovereign

God of grace and love has to act. Yet to represent the religions of the world as *somehow*, however imperfect and crude it may be, a *παιδαγωγός*, a schoolmaster to Christ, is a distorted presentation of these religions and their fundamental structure and tendencies, and a misunderstanding of the Christian revelation. This apprehension of the essential 'otherness' of the world of divine realities revealed in Jesus Christ from the atmosphere of religion as we know it in the history of the race, cannot be grasped merely by way of investigation and reasoning. Only an attentive study of the Bible can open the eyes to the fact that Christ 'the power of God' and 'the wisdom of God' stands in contradiction to the power and the wisdom of man. Perhaps in some respects it were proper to speak of contradictory or subversive fulfilment.

My second contention in my book was this: there are facts which everyone can recognise and verify if he takes the trouble to investigate them, demonstrating that the reality of the various religions of mankind simply forbids us to construe a relation of preparation and fulfilment between these religions and the Christian revelation, or to view them as somehow continuous to each other. There I may be allowed to use the words of one of my opponents. Mr P. Chenchiah, in his able and searching scrutiny of my book, rightly says: 'If we take the "revelation" claimed in different religions, we have to confess that they do not piece together or form an intelligible whole. The Vedas, the Koran, the Gospel do not make a coherent scheme. They do not even answer the same questions.' The claims of the various religions are clearly conflicting. Even more pertinent

is what Mr Chenchiah remarks some pages later : 'The facile presumption that in Hinduism we have search for salvation without satisfaction and that Christianity satisfied the longing is untrue to fact.' 'The supreme longing of the Hindu, to escape from *samsara*, Christ does not satisfy, and the Lord's gift of rebirth does not appeal to the Hindu. Thus the correspondence of longing and satisfaction fails.' 'Jesus kindles new hopes not felt before and kills some of the deepest and persistent longings of man.' These dicta of Mr Chenchiah on the relation of Hinduism to Christianity deserve our close attention. They stress facts that are generally glossed over in the discussion, because the laudable desire not to overlook or minimise religious insights or aspirations which arrest by their depth and quality blinds the eyes to the real elements of the discussion. Appreciation thus leads towards entirely unwarranted and untenable identifications. To add another example to the facts adduced by Mr Chenchiah. Nobody will deny the lofty plane in which original Mazdaism moves, nor will anyone contradict the statement that in Mazdaism and Christianity many expectations and ideas seem closely akin to each other. Yet it is impossible to represent the ideal believer of the *Avesta* as the prototype of the man who lives by the faith of Christ, because, when speaking in accordance with the fundamental facts, the Mazdean believer is the courageous and self-confident fighter for God—and what a marvellous man he may be!—whereas the man who lives by the faith of Christ, although he has also to be a strenuous fighter, is in the first and in the last instance a *pardoned sinner*. Everyone who investigates the documents and penetrates sympathetically into

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the spirit of these religions, can find this out without any difficulty.

In maintaining these main theses of my book—as regards the problem of how to relate the Christian revelation and Christianity as a historical religion with the non-Christian religions—I cling to a few fundamental principles that must be constantly kept in mind. If not, it is hardly to be avoided that all our discussions will end in confusion and deepened misunderstanding. The amount of agreement and mutual understanding *in regard to this problem*, reached in Tambaram, has been so appallingly small that we in the first place stand in need of a patient endeavour to understand and probe each other's presuppositions and starting-points. The great danger that threatens our international discussions on Christian topics is not so much an undue and unchristian acerbity, as a generous politeness that, largely unwittingly, covers an indifference to or an impatience with each other's presuppositions.

These few fundamental principles are the following. In all my reasoning and in all my efforts to formulate my opinion, I take my standpoint *within* the realm of the Christian revelation. From it I take my standards of judgment and evaluation. The Christian revelation itself is my authoritative guide and no other principle or standpoint. The only difficulty I encounter here—and this really is a great one—is that I have only a partial and imperfect understanding of the Christian revelation and therefore but a defective grasp of its standards of evaluation and judgment. Only the guidance of the Holy Spirit can gradually bring a deepening of insight,

sensitivity and pureness of judgment. If anyone deems this a prejudiced position, I do not deny this in the least, but still I have to make some remarks.

My retort to an opponent of this principle who does not count himself a believer in Christ, would be: if you call me prejudiced because I have a *ποῦ στῶ* (firm standpoint), I refer to the fact that in this sense everybody is prejudiced, and that there is no thinking man who can live without such an ultimate. Therefore the real struggle between men is the struggle of ultimates. If you object to my taking the Christian revelation as my starting-point and standard of reference, I beg you to inform me whether your starting-point and standard of reference is, speaking on the *human* plane, less subjective or more objective—and more discerningly critical.

My answer to an opponent, who confesses himself to be a believer in Christ, would run along another line, because such a stupendous and incredible kind of person as a sincere Christian who does not, in thinking and reasoning about the meaning of the non-Christian religions, take his stand *within* the realm of the Christian revelation—or at any rate does not do so consciously and of intent—really does exist in our modern world. On account of his sincere desire for intellectual honesty he poses as taking a more 'objective' and 'neutral' standpoint as the summit from which he views and pictures the landscape of the religious life of mankind, evidently entirely unaware of the fact that his supposedly unprejudiced objectivity rests on a blurring of insight. He ignores the fact that the imperative demand for a fearlessly critical and honest spirit does not dispense him from the inescapable human reality that every man in

spiritual matters must live by his decision for some ultimate, to which he never can become related as a mere 'objective' spectator. Therefore I would answer my fellow-Christian opponent: How can I, and how can you, ignore the fact that our whole apprehension of religious life is moulded and coloured by our contact with and knowledge of Christ? How can we acknowledge Him as the ultimate authority and standard in all things religious, and then try to find a so-called wider and more inclusive standpoint from which to probe and determine the significance and meaning of the religious dream of mankind? This simply means that there is another ultimate standard than Christ, a so-called general religious *a priori* by which even Christ, who upsets all human standards, is measured. At any rate for a Christian this standpoint leads to hopeless confusion. To speak in theological terms, such a man lives by the data of 'general revelation' as the principle of evaluation.

Another fundamental principle which underlies all my endeavours to reason about our subject is that a persistent and attentive listening to the Bible is essential, if there is to be any possibility of a 'Christian' view of our problem. Since the rise of modern biblical research, with its many beneficent and disastrous results—on the whole far more beneficent than disastrous—even amongst sincere Christians, there has arisen a great danger, namely, the tendency to live with the Bible as far as religious edification is concerned, but not to take it seriously as the valid and normative guide for our theological thinking. Our various ideologies, resulting from and moulded by the stream of Christian tradition and experience and by various currents of ancient or modern thought, are the

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real points of orientation. The discovery of the human and historically-conditioned trappings, in which the message of biblical realism is expressed, has gained such prominence in the thinking of many a Christian that to him, although he uses the Bible with deep reverence and gratitude for purposes of spiritual nurture, the Bible is, theologically speaking, an interesting and highly important piece of religious literature, but not a unique book with a standard of its own, as containing the prophetic and apostolic witness to God's dealing with mankind, the Word of God. The Bible may still be more or less profusely quoted to substantiate our religious views—by the way, a danger which threatens all theologians in all times—but is not really recognised as the central orientation-point for our theological thinking as being in a more stringent and compelling way a vehicle for the Holy Spirit than any other production. This discrepancy between the religious (or edificatory) and theological application of the Bible is, in my opinion, a secret poison that subtly undermines the sincerity and strength of our theological thinking.

Lastly, the results of the so-called comparative study of religion have also their due weight and influence in the way our problem has to be stated. After much painstaking and brilliant research we are far better informed about the varieties of religious life than ever before. Of the religions that have played an important rôle in human history, a solid mass of material has been made accessible to everyone who wants to take the trouble to penetrate into it. Although much research and debate is going on, we are fairly well informed about the characteristic features of the various religions, their historical

development and their spiritual habits. We know a good deal about their similarities and differences. The phenomena and institutions that are common to all religions have been studied in their general and essential aspect. The history, the psychology, the phenomenology and the philosophy of religion work hand in hand to unearth the fundamental structure of the religious life of mankind. Although every religion is a self-contained and characteristic entity, a specimen of its own, it appears more and more that all religions manifest identical motives and tendencies of development and decay. Notwithstanding the fact that there are still many great and small sinners against the law, the widely recognised goal of modern research in the field of religions and religion is to try to understand them—not in the logical or intellectual sense of the word, but in that of sympathetic understanding of their essential nature and function—according to the *intention* that animates them and gives them their peculiar life and attitude.

What is the scope and weight of this fruitful labour in the field of religion for the elucidation of our problem? In my opinion its important function is to serve as an eye-opener, paving the way for a more adequate—adequate *in bonam et in malam partem*—and intelligent judgment and evaluation about the meaning and function of religion in its many forms to the life of man. We have to adopt the attitude of an attentive and teachable hearer to the data presented to us by this branch of research. Comparative religion, however, can and must never become our authoritative guide. Its proper function is to be our intelligent and much appreciated informant. So used, and combined with the guidance we derive from

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biblical realism, it can help us enormously to combine, in our attitude towards the non-Christian religions as systems of life and experience, that downright intrepidity and radical humility about which I spoke in my book.

The preceding reiteration of my position and the short description of the lights by which I am guided, has been given in order to promote clarification and mutual understanding (which does not at all necessarily mean general agreement). The whole problem of the relation of the Christian revelation to the non-Christian religions, or to put it otherwise, of the meaning of the religious quest and adventure of mankind, is a rather complex problem, and the development of human faculties and achievements in the last four centuries has tended towards making it look even more complex than before. It is not so easy as it was some centuries ago to decide where, in respect of religion, valid truth and reality can be recognised, and where not. Our outlook has become broadened and deepened; our self-criticism justly has become sharpened. Or, to express it more adequately, we *ought* to have a broader outlook and a more effective self-criticism if we really take to heart the fruitage of the development in human thinking and discovery. We may, perhaps, come to the same fundamental conclusions as our ancestors did, because, after all, mankind has, in all essential problems, the choice between only a few fundamental positions; but our struggles to arrive at them cannot but be more complex and agonising, as we know better than they possibly could about the realities of the various religions and of Christianity. We have learnt—or at least *ought* to have learnt—that Christianity as a historical religion has to be distinguished very sharply

from the Christian revelation, because Christianity, as the well-known historical phenomenon which belongs to world history and church history, has in very many respects to be put on the same plane as the other religions of mankind. Formerly, this clear and indispensable distinction was not made, and Christianity and the Christian revelation were always loosely identified with each other, which inevitably kept the discussion confused. This distinction is mainly the fruit of more consistent theological thinking, which, by plunging deeper into the secrets of biblical thinking, fully grasped the truth that the Christian revelation, just because it witnesses to God's thinking and acting in regard to man and the world, is not only the 'crisis' (judgment) and redemption of the ethnic religions, but is just as much the crisis and judgment of Christianity as a historic religion. The recognition of this distinction is even more important than another insight, one of the great results of the assiduous and dispassionate research into comparative religion, namely, the realisation that, in comparing various religions, it is stupid, malicious and unjust to evaluate the ethnic religions according to their dark sides and historic Christianity according to its bright sides.

In our thinking about the problem put before us, we must take as our programme: be scrupulously just to the *facts*; to the *facts* of the Christian revelation and to the *facts* of the religious life of mankind in its various aspects. This scrupulous justice to the facts does not necessarily mean favourable and suave judgments. Neither of these, however, has to be our aim. Our sole aim must be to get at *true* judgments, and then we shall

see whether, according to human sentiment these judgments are favourable or harsh.

In this essay, I am giving so much space to the reiteration of my position and the preceding considerations because I am deeply convinced that our so-called Christian thinking on an international scale will never really become co-operative and fruitful, if we do not afford each other the opportunity of understanding each other's *ποῦ στῶ*. Sincerely co-operative thinking which passionately aspires after truth and after truth *alone* does not mean a hotch-potch of various views, but a courageous wrestling with each other about the most reverent and faithful way to interpret God's mind as it shines in Jesus Christ, our Lord. Therefore we need to understand the presuppositions of each other's *ποῦ στῶ* and we must abandon the much-practised habit of hurling at each other general assertions about the divine qualities or the god-forsakenness of the non-Christian religions. The problem whether and, if so where, and in how far, God, i.e. the God and Father of Jesus Christ, the only God we Christians know—has been and is working in the religious history of the world and in man in his quest for goodness, truth and beauty, is a baffling and awful problem. Just in the light of the Christian revelation, by which we mean the revelational activity of the God and Father of Jesus Christ, the problem becomes still more baffling and awful, because our thinking has to be done in the spirit of Christ, which involves prophetic frankness and priestly mercifulness and prudence at the same time. Well considered, although many shades and emphases actually occur, there are two fundamental positions that can be taken. The first maintains the

continuity between the essential tendencies and aspirations to be found in the ethnic religions and the essential gift of the Christian religion. Those who maintain this position prefer words such as 'fulfilment' and 'general revelation'; the more system-loving amongst them try to construe a 'natural theology' as a fitting and indispensable introduction to the 'theology of revelation.'

The second position stresses the discontinuity, and takes this as the starting-point of its thinking. This involves the radical or the conditional rejection of all 'natural theology' and a vehement or more moderate abhorrence of terms such as 'fulfilment' and 'general revelation.'

It would be a fascinating psychological study to analyse the motives, subjective and objective, which compel various people to pitch their tents in one or other of these two camps, but we are here not concerned about psychology, but about the essential attitudes that can be taken in this dramatic debate about truth. Our present endeavours to define our positions, according to the exigencies of our time and situation, are but modifications of the age-old theme and the age-old solutions, but they are, on account of the fierce spiritual antagonisms of our time, of overwhelming importance. In my opinion it may be of great advantage to our international discussion to sketch shortly the classical formulations of the thesis of essential continuity and of radical discontinuity. I therefore propose to turn to the fertile ideas of Clement of Alexandria¹ on our problem, and to Barth's lucid

¹ For this part of my paper I am greatly indebted to Einar Molland's book on: *The Conception of the Gospel in the Alexandrian Theology* (Oslo, 1938) to which I refer, because I repeatedly use the very words of the author.

exposition of his discontinuity-thesis in the second part of the first volume of his book *Die kirchliche Dogmatik* (1938).

To Clement the problems of religions and the true religion, the relation of the Christian revelation and Greek philosophy were matters of life and death. His authorities were the teaching of the Lord, the doctrine of the apostles, the tradition of the Church and the contents of the Scriptures. These four, to him, were in harmony and were manifestations of the Gospel. Evidently Clement intended to be a thoroughly orthodox man. At the same time, however, Clement held the position that all history is one because all truth is one. He declined to separate the history of Israel from that of all other peoples.

To him it appeared that it would be in flagrant contradiction to God's justice if some men had no possibility of attaining to the knowledge of God. On the other hand, Clement held strongly that *true* revelation is only to be found in Christ. The incompatibility of these two positions and the abiding tension resulting therefrom Clement endeavours to reconcile by the conception of Christ as the *Logos*, the author of the general revelation among the peoples of the earth. As a basis for the concept of the *Logos*, the author of the general revelation, he stresses the idea of the kinship of God and man. There is a divine element in man, which enables man to attain to the full vision of God, and the *Logos* to exercise its activity. By his great intelligence Clement shows himself quite aware of the difficulties inherent in this set of ideas. In the line of man's natural kinship with God, especially if thought out so audaciously as

Clement sometimes does, Christ's incarnation becomes superfluous or, at least, not absolutely necessary. The consciousness of this danger is, however, sometimes so strong in Clement that, instead of asserting the idea of a natural knowledge of God—in other words, of the necessity and possibility of 'natural theology'—he strongly denies it and simply retires on the position that all depends on God's mercy and on nothing else. Yet, he constantly recurs to the scheme of a 'general revelation' being the cause of the knowledge of God as manifested in the Greek philosophers, because time and again he appears to be gripped by the thought that there are elements of truth in the teaching of all nations. General revelation does not, then, mean to him that all men are saved by their natural faith, or that all religious men have the true knowledge of God. It implies that all mankind is instructed and prepared for Christ when He comes. So Christianity becomes, with Clement, the true philosophy, and Greek philosophy—although he exercises here a selective choice—is a preparation, a schoolmaster, *παιδαγωγός* to Christ. He even does not shrink from speaking about Greek philosophy as the covenant (*διαθήκη*) peculiar to the Greeks, just as the 'Old Covenant' (i.e. the Old Testament) has been bestowed upon the Jews. The 'New Covenant,' the Gospel, is different, but it is also the continuation and completion of the ancient covenants. The *Logos*, having been always in the world, the religious history of mankind is a unity in which the Incarnation of Christ is the culmination point.

Yet, when Clement approaches Greek philosophy *concretely*, he begins to waver again, and his ideas become

vague and contradictory. Philosophy is a result of some glimmerings of the divine *Logos*; it is a preparation for Christ, but still it has many weaknesses because it remained mixed up with idolatry and polytheism, and the moral standard of the Greeks was far from commendable. It apprehends the truth only accidentally, dimly, partially, and does not convey the strength to perform the commandments of the Lord. In order to account for these indubitable facts Clement, who sometimes elevates Greek philosophy to the rank of a covenant from God, can only help himself by saying that philosophy is not a direct and primary gift of God (as the Christian revelation is) but an indirect and secondary one, which means in our present-day language that revelation is a divine gift, and religion and philosophy a human effort, from which mysteriously and intangibly God's activity is not wholly absent. Clement, in this connection, frankly recognises that philosophy cannot be a sufficient basis for knowledge of God. Neither is it necessary for attaining to knowledge of God. Faith alone is necessary, philosophy may be useful to attain salvation, but is not a cause, because although there may be many paths that lead to righteousness, Christ alone is the gate of righteousness.

Now let us turn to Barth.¹ He treats our problems under the significant title: *Gottes Offenbarung als Aufhebung der Religion* (the revelation of God as the dissolution of religion). His fundamental starting-point is that both the act of revealing (*a parte Dei*) and the experience of the revelation (*a parte hominis*) are from God.

¹ *Die kirchliche Dogmatik*, Zweiter Halbband des ersten Teils, 1938. The part we refer to is to be found in paragraph 17.

The revelation is solely and exclusively divine possibility and divine reality. The universal phenomenon of religion presents itself as a vital problem just because it cannot be denied that revelation is also something that happens to *man*, and in happening to man it assumes the likeness of human conditions, experiences and activities. This human likeness or face of the revelation, or in other words, this human psychological and historical structure, we call Christianity. In so far as it is a human aspect of the divine revelation Christianity stands on a level with the other religions and as such it has its special nature, but is not absolutely unique.

In surveying the religious life of mankind, we find, according to Barth, that everywhere man is conscious of being related to an Ultimate, and of a consecrated form of life resulting from this relation. Therefore we find everywhere also that man, though with different accents, is speaking of the same things as Christianity does; of sin, of salvation, of revelation, etc. This forces us to the conclusion that the human possibilities and realities in the field of religion manifest many analogies to the possibilities and realities of the divine revelation, as these are reflected in the sphere of 'Christianity' as a historical and psychological phenomenon. The Christian revelation, to which prophets and apostles bear witness in the Bible, appears also under the guise of a 'religion,' i.e. Christianity. This indisputable and important fact requires, on the other hand, that religion in its human manifestation never can be in any sense the source from which we derive our standard of reference for the revelation. In other words, religions and religion have to be judged from the standpoint of the Christian revelation, not the reverse, as you

cannot take the reflection of the sun as the standard for the sun itself.

What, then, are religions and religion in the light of the revelation? Barth's answer is: *Unglaube* (unbelief, non-faith). This answer, Barth reminds us emphatically, has nothing to do with a negative judgment about non-Christian religions nor with a rejection of human values, nor with a despal of all the true and beautiful and the good that can be found in *all* religions, because reverence for God implies reverence for man. The judgment that 'religion' essentially means 'unbelief' (non-faith) does not derive, and cannot legitimately be derived, from our human comparison of values, but from the reality inherent in the Christian revelation. Why are both religion and the religions essentially unbelief? Because they do not constitute a real response to God's self-manifestation in Jesus Christ. If one compares their inner nature with the spiritual reality revealed in this self-manifestation, they are rather the contrary, i.e. not response but resistance. In this light all religions appear to be overt or covert endeavours towards self-justification, self-sanctification and self-redemption, in one word: unbelief—not acknowledging God as He really is according to the revelation in Christ. The history of religions is the endless and manifold repetition of these endeavours. While fully recognising the human greatness which is revealed in the religions of mankind, in the light of the Christian revelation we cannot but state that it is 'lost' in the biblical sense of this word.

The aim I pursued in outlining Clement's and Barth's position is threefold. First, it enables us to see our problem and the classic ways to solve it more concretely.

Secondly, these classic solutions indicate very clearly that we grapple with a problem which baffles our human thinking. Clement's position, which appeals to many minds as so intrinsically 'reasonable' is, logically speaking, an inconsistent wavering between two poles that appear, when thought out, to be irreconcilable, namely, the theology of the Incarnation and the theory of general revelation. If either of them is taken as fundamental truth the other must as a matter of course be rejected. The two beliefs can be held simultaneously only if they are taken in a tamed and emaciated sense. It is very important to note that Clement, who wanted to be a thorough Christian, in the passages where with all vigour he maintains the theology of the Incarnation, inevitably is forced towards a rather lame appreciation of Greek philosophy, *when considered as to its kinship and similarity with the spiritual realities contained in the Christian revelation*, though not, of course, as to its immanent value.

Barth's position is, rationally speaking, much simpler and more compelling. In justice to Clement it has to be said that the way in which he states the terms of the problem makes it much more intricate than in Barth's case. Yet, the reason that Barth's position is more compelling is not a matter of better and simpler logic, but of deeper and more consistent religious and theological thinking. Clement's handicap is that to him revelation and philosophy are essentially wisdom, knowledge. Notwithstanding his sincere conviction that true revelation is only in Christ, he conceives of the revelation as the highest and truest kind of 'idealism' (this word here to be understood in its purely philo-

sophical meaning). According to the Bible, however, revelation means sovereign, merciful and divine activity, because incarnation is void if it is not primarily that. Barth's strength, and the great significance of his thinking for our problem, is that he keeps unwaveringly to this fundamental religious position. The revelation in Christ has to be our sole standard of reference and no systematised general revelation, of whatever kind it may be. Yet, our heart and mind are not wholly satisfied by Barth's impressive statement either. Not so much because he intersperses his closely reasoned exposition with many statements that rouse doubt and protest. These do not concern us here. His true contention that religion in general, and also the religions, are, in the light of the revelation in Christ, unbelief and rejection of God as He really is in Jesus Christ, leaves unanswered and untreated many questions which cannot be ignored. Were those, who lived under the sway of the non-Christian religions, entirely left to their own devices, or has God also somehow worked in them? If the last supposition is true—and there are indications in the Bible that point in that direction—is it possible to determine the cases and experiences of this responsiveness to God as He is in Jesus Christ? This has nothing to do with construing systems of natural theology or of general revelation, but with respect for facts. Another question of great importance is: if it is true that there is much that is true, good and beautiful in the non-Christian religions, what is their relation to God and His working in man, for God 'does not abandon the work of His hands.' In this connection we also come to grips with the problem of the religious (i.e. God-related) meaning of science, art, philosophy

and the experience of the numinous. Still another question is: if a great deal of the religious life of mankind is aberration and subjection to demonic powers which are antagonistic to God and His holy will—and in my opinion this is a fact—what must we say about it in the light of the Christian revelation? The Bible in this context uses the concept of the world lying under the wrath of God.

The third aim I pursued in outlining Clement's and Barth's positions is that, fundamentally speaking, we have in regard to our problem only to choose between two positions: to start, consciously or unconsciously, from a general idea about the essence of religion and take that as our standard of reference, or derive our idea of what religion really is or ought to be from the revelation in Christ, and consistently stick to this as the sole standard of reference. To my mind, the choice of the second of these our alternatives is inescapable. The programme I see for the years to come is to strive after a clearer answer to the series of questions formulated above, on the basis of a consistent clinging to the authoritative guidance of biblical realism. If time and circumstances will permit me, I intend to make further study of these questions, especially in regard to Hinduism and its many manifestations, because the analogies and parallels with ideas and experiences occurring in 'Christianity' are in this case peculiarly concrete. The problem of the immanence of God and what to think about it from the standpoint of biblical realism, will then be of fundamental importance.

✓ good

Joseph B. Bustillos
MT 533: Theology of Religious Encounter
Feb. 8, 1984

Essay Review: What is the Value of the Religious Values of the Non-Christian Religions? by Robert Speer.

Dr. Speer's essay is a record of the feelings that were brewing prior to Jerusalem Meeting of 1928. In the wake of a fear of growing syncretism, Dr. Speer questions the naivete of some of the delegates in their praise of non-Christian religions. To this point much had been written about the "Value" of the non-Christian religions and Speer attempts to bring out another side to these "Values" that had not been dealt with (and also how these "Values" stack up in comparison to Christianity).

There is much in Dr. Speer's essay that is of value. One particular part (which was also brought out in our class lectures) was the climate of the Church at the time. In my previous ignorance I had been used to associating the Christianity of Europe (particularly Germany) as having a more "Liberal" understanding of the Faith and the Church in America (read, "Non-denominational") as being more conservative. As the late Dr. Schäffer would have had me believe, the Church in America was "liberalized" by its association with the seminaries of Germany, leading to the Modernist/Fundamentalist Dispute and the rise of the Social Gospel, etc. But to see it from the point of view of the Continentalist's (read, Barthians) it was the Americans that were enamored with the Social Gospel and Syncretistic idealism. Even though that's still an over-generalization it does constitute another facet in my still incomplete picture of how we got to where we are (Christianity in the '80s).

While acknowledging the values of the non-Christian Faiths he points out that there is often a credibility gap between the particular Faith and the people that adhere to that Faith (as is also true in Christianity). Thus if these values are to be dealt with on a practical level they must be balanced with an understanding of the individual with whom one is in dialogue¹. Another aspect is that while various Faiths may value a particular truth, that truth may play a completely different roll in the understanding of the Faith, and consequently render it unusable in terms of Dialogue. And Finally, all truths must be converted or re-learned in view of the Person of Jesus Christ.

Dr. Speer's essay is certainly a much need voice of affirmation for the central purpose of Christian mission. ✓✓

FOOTNOTES

¹"Dialogue" is obviously used here anachronistically.

JERUSALEM MEETING 1928

International Missionary
Council

Vol. 1.

The Christian Message

CHAPTER X

WHAT IS THE VALUE OF THE RELIGIOUS VALUES OF THE NON-CHRISTIAN RELIGIONS?

Robert E. Speer, D.D., LL.D.

I. INTRODUCTION

WHEN this volume was planned it was expected that the present chapter would be prepared by Dr. Hendrick Kraemer, formerly of Java, now "Deputed Officer of the Netherlands Bible Society for Scientific Work in Missionary Service." Dr. Kraemer had himself raised, in one of the meetings in Jerusalem, in a very penetrating and impressive speech, the fundamental question as to the value of the values which the preliminary papers had found in the non-Christian religions. No one was better qualified than he to deal with this question both because of his sympathetic understanding of the non-Christian religions and because of his clear apprehension of the unique and universal elements in Christianity. He cheerfully undertook the task assigned him, but a temporary setback in health has prevented his accomplishing it. It has been necessary, accordingly, for some one else at the last moment to endeavor to take Dr. Kraemer's place.

Happily the missionary issue involved, in some of its aspects at least, has been stated by Dr. Kraemer himself in a report of a meeting held in Cairo on March 16, 1928, by the Continental delegates on their way to Jerusalem. I will quote Dr. Kraemer's report:

"In the meeting of Continental delegates to the Jerusalem Meeting, held in the Y. M. C. A., Cairo, on March 16, the papers on the relation of Christianity and the non-Christian systems came up for discussion.

"The debate was opened by the German delegates who expressed frankly but candidly a feeling of uneasiness about

the trend of the papers. They felt as if, generally speaking, the papers were drifting on the dangerous waters of syncretism and insufficiently worked out the essential difference and absolute uniqueness of Christianity. With deep earnestness they emphasized that, however great our appreciation of the religious values and forces in other religions may be, we simply may not and cannot move from the fundamental base and nerve of all real missionary activity; that God revealed Himself by His saving acts towards mankind in history and in an absolutely unique and unsurpassable way in Jesus Christ, who is the way to come to the Father, the divine token of mercy and reconciliation. Jerusalem must have a clear and unambiguous message to the world on that point.

"The delegates of other Continental countries formulated in a somewhat different manner the same feelings. There were amongst them some who avowed to have been troubled in reading the pamphlets and who desired to see stated, in a more unequivocal way than seemed to be done by the papers, the fact that Christianity is a religion sui generis in the most pregnant sense of the word. However, full confidence was expressed that in reality the authors of the pamphlets did not differ from the fundamental standpoint as formulated in the meeting and there was voiced a not less deep-felt appreciation of the arduous devotion of the authors to the task of detecting the religious and moral values that possibly can be stated in non-Christian systems. Finally the meeting agreed on the following points, that may be worded in this way:

"1. That the feelings and standpoint of the Continental delegates in this most vital matter should be brought to the notice of the Committee of the International Missionary Council under the form of a communication.

"2. That the uneasiness about the eventual syncretistic trend of the papers must not be brought to the forum in Jerusalem under the form of an accusation, but under the form of a question whether this way of tackling the problem will not unconsciously lead towards an undesirable and undesired syncretism.

"3. That most probably the papers have not shed sufficient light on the essence of Christianity as such, for three reasons: (a) The authors have been asked to estimate the religious values of the different systems. (b) Two points that had to be separately treated in order to get the maximum of clearness, i.e., the essential nature of Christianity and of the other religions, and the problem of contacts, have become too much mixed up. The missionary sorely needs contacts, but he needs still more an absolute, joyful conviction about the Christian truth. (c) The authors as very zealous and devoted missionaries have stressed the point of contacts and similarities, just because they are so deeply founded in the Christian life and conviction.

"4. That it is not only a Christian duty but a Christian privilege to detect with joy and thankfulness all that is sublime and God-like in the non-Christian systems, yea, that it must be our privilege to formulate this for the adherents of those systems better than they can do themselves. Yet the meeting has the conviction that the most sublime and heart-stirring elements, if they are to be ruled by Jesus Christ, have to be converted and regenerated in order to come to their complete fulfilment."

The communication referred to in this report expressing the feelings and standpoint of the Continental delegates was prepared and presented at Jerusalem in the following form:

"A number of Continental delegates to the Jerusalem conference feel constrained to put into words the conviction which we hope is common to all delegates, namely, that all our mission work is based exclusively on the great acts of God for the redemption of mankind: in particular the sending of His only begotten Son, His death on the Cross for the redemption of the world, His resurrection as the beginning of a new God-given life for redeemed humanity. We are the messengers of God to proclaim this redemption. The context of our message is the Father God whose children we become through our Saviour Jesus Christ, and the invitation to accept this salvation by faith. Therefore it is the

main task of missions to work for the conversion of men, that is, their conscious break with their past life, the New Testament *metanoia* required of all Christians.

"In view of these facts, though fully acknowledging the spiritual values in the non-Christian religions, we are disquieted by the question whether the offer of salvation to non-Christians can be made by setting over against one another the spiritual values of the non-Christian and the Christian religions, the scheme followed by most of the papers presented to us.

"Further, we do not believe that the central task of the Christian missions can be accomplished by a so-called 'Social Gospel,' banding together all men of goodwill across the boundary lines of different religions in a common warfare against the evils of the world, indispensable and urgent though this warfare is.

"In view of the ominously rising tide of syncretism in the modern world and the fact that the missionary movement is inevitably bound up with modern civilization, with its blessings and its curses, we regard it as an urgent duty for Protestant missions of all lands to stand firm on the basis of the way of salvation set forth in the whole Bible."

The issue between the conception of Christianity as unique and universal and absolute and a syncretistic effort to combine all religions, Christianity and the non-Christian religions alike, in a new composite was clearly faced and answered in the discussion already reported in an earlier chapter and in the Message which the Council unanimously adopted. In so far as the Council could speak for the missionary enterprise and for the Christian Church both in the older branches of it and on the mission field, there is to be no attempt at an amalgamated religion. The missionary enterprise will not be a search for a more adequate and satisfactory religion than Christianity. It will be the offer of the only Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ to the whole world and the common effort of Christian men of all lands and races to explore and experience His unsearchable riches, infinite and inexhaustible.

II. ATTITUDE AND APPROACH

There remains, however, the question of attitude and approach on the part of Christianity to the non-Christian religions. And a part of this question is the problem raised by Dr. Kraemer, "What is the value of the religious values of the non-Christian religions discussed in the preliminary papers?"

No doubt some of the confusion and uneasiness which has been noted arose from the use of the word "values," an economic term taken over by theology during the past generation and having rather distinct associations and implications. And further perplexity sprang from the confinement of attention so largely to "values" with deliberate omission for the most part of reference to the items on the other side of the balance sheet: the faults, shortcomings, and defects. This omission was deliberate and intentional, as part of an effort to find the most effective and persuasive approach for the Christian message. And it is to be hoped that the result in the Message adopted by the Council and in the actual presentation of Christianity to the non-Christian peoples may prove ultimately to be a full vindication of the method pursued at Jerusalem.

But this will be the case only in proportion as we find and follow the way of truth with regard both to Christianity and to the non-Christian systems; and the discovery and pursuit of this way requires a consideration of the question of the value of the values which we discover in the non-Christian religions.

HUMAN REALITY AND PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

The question, happily, is not one of attitude either toward the non-Christian religions as religious systems or toward their adherents. The Christian attitude for us is plain. It is the attitude in which the Bishop of Winchester, blind and far advanced in years, counseled Boniface to approach the souls to whom he was sent in Hesse, avoiding scrupulously all contemptuous and violent language, and trying

above all things to show forth a spirit of moderation and patience. The Japanese delegates brought with them to Jerusalem a pamphlet of findings¹ from the National Christian Council of Japan which dealt with this question of relation and attitude. They set forth the "points of superiority of Christianity as compared with other religions," i.e., Buddhism, Shintoism, and Confucianism, as follows:

"1. The conception of God as personal, making clear the ethical relation between God and man.

"2. Man not seeking to find God but God taking the initiative in seeking for man. Progress not through human effort but through God's condescension.

"3. The sense of personality. Respect for individuality and recognition of the absoluteness of the value of personality.

"4. Its Scriptures, condensed into one volume, can conveniently be carried anywhere and understood by any one.

"5. Its superlative ethical sense. Its emphasis on clean living and new advance for the life of every day. Especially does it emphasize the purity of the home.

"6. Its stressing of social justice and social service."

Then the Japanese pamphlet asked, "How should these points of superiority be made known to men?" and its first answer was:

"By avoiding comparison with other religions and positively and boldly declaring the essential elements of the Christian faith, that is, a declaration of the whole Gospel of Christ."

To these findings an appendix was added, from the "Findings of the Federation of Christian Missions in Japan," "on the presentation of the Christian message in relation to the non-Christian faiths of Japan" with the following counsel:

"The first great essential in the presentation of the Christian message is a firm grasp on the great spiritual realities for which Christianity stands and the ability to distinguish between what is real content and what is but the form and clothing of the Christian message."

¹See: *The Christian Movement in Japan and Formosa*, Tokyo: The Federation of Christian Missions in Japan, 1928, pp. 259-65.

"The second great essential is a sympathetic attitude and open-mindedness towards, and a real knowledge of, the non-Christian faiths.

"Our study of these non-Christian faiths should include not only what they were in their beginnings and historical evolution, but especially what they are to-day and what they are trying to become.

"All higher non-Christian religions are in one way or another quests on man's part for the enrichment of his life by establishing vital relationships with the Divine.

★ "Probably the wiser approach would be that while on the one hand we recognize the existence of so-called non-Christian faiths and systems, we think, on the other hand, largely in terms of the individual adherents of these systems, realizing that there are enormous differences among them, and that some are far nearer the Christian conception and manner of life than others. These individuals might be classified roughly as follows:

"1. The ignorant masses on whom popular Buddhism and Shintō still have a very strong hold and whose conception as to what the true enrichment of life is and what the divine might be is pathetically crude and inadequate. With them might be grouped the professional religionists who themselves either hold such views or deal with their adherents in terms of popular Buddhism and Shintō. *derelict classes?*

"2. Rare spirits among the old-fashioned Buddhists and Shintoists who have been little influenced by Western life and civilization but who as sincere seekers after truth have found a spiritual life of a noble and high order.

"3. A large and growing group among Buddhists and Shintoists who have been greatly influenced by our expanding common world-culture and by Christianity and who, though loyal to their old faiths, are often nearer the Christian position than they are to the traditional position of their fathers in the faith.

"4. An even larger group made up of all classes and degrees of education, who do not regard themselves as adherents of the faiths of their fathers or of any definite faith,

but who are largely the product of our modern common world-culture. This large group divides itself into two main sections: (a) Those who are religious and who in their whole outlook on life are often very near the Christian position. (b) Those who are essentially indifferent to religion in any form."

A This is bringing the whole matter down to a basis of human reality and defining the issue in terms of personal relationships between men and women. It must always ultimately come to this. But the question remains a real and just question. In what sense are these religious values of the non-Christian religions real values in themselves and in their relationship to the missionary effort to carry the Gospel to all the world?

REAL VALUES

1. They are real values in the witness they bear to great spiritual needs and to some elemental religious ideas. A memorandum presented to the meeting in Jerusalem by the Swedish Missionary Council noted four of these ideas:

a. Wherever we meet religion it presents its claim of revealing the Eternal. There are religions which lack much of that which we usually consider as indispensable to religion, even an idea of God. But there is no religion which does not attempt to reveal eternity in the world of time.

b. As the second characteristic feature of all religion we might mention reverence, anxiety, judgment in view of eternity. The experience of the Eternal always brings with it seriousness and solemnity.

c. The third characteristic feature of all religion is manifested in the step which with logical consequence results from the conditions described above, and in the tension between them. The glory of the Lord reveals the unworthiness of man; the holiness of the Lord judges the sin of man; the wrath of God—the Eternal seen as a consuming fire—this and nothing else seems to be the result of the two aspects of religion which we have hitherto considered. "No man can see the Eternal and live."

Eternity
Threshold of
Eternity
Contact
of Eternity

Religion seeks to overcome the tension which it has created. It would build a bridge between the Holy One and the sinner, and it would create something that shall cover the unworthiness of man: it will point out ways and means for covering sin. This is the group of phenomena in the history of religion which is described as purification, atonement, and sacrifices. Even though such outward means of atonement are less prominent in certain kinds of religion, especially in those of a mystical trend, the fact remains that we are here confronted with something that is essential in all religion.

d. This leads us on to the fourth characteristic feature of all religion: it claims to establish real life-fellowship, life-unity between the Eternal and man, to infuse in man divine life. It is not sufficient that these two, the Divine and the human, stand in juxtaposition as two parties fundamentally different although reconciled to each other. The Eternal and man must not be contrasts. They must not be impenetrable to each other. All true religion aims at permeating the whole of human life with the Divine. God living in the soul, the soul united with God: this is the goal of religion.

On each of these points the Swedish statement held that Christianity distinguished itself in unique and qualitative ways from all other religions and that there were other points in which it stood apart with nothing in common with them; but in these four respects there were intimations and recognitions in the non-Christian religions which had reality of value in themselves as well as in preparation for the fulness of the Christian truth.

2. They were real values also inasmuch as they testify to the spiritual view of life and the world and provide in their measure a resistance to the secular and mechanical conceptions which are threatening to dominate human thought and which are discussed in Professor Rufus M. Jones's chapter and in the Report of the Sectional Meeting on Secular Civilization at Jerusalem.

3. They are real values in so far as they remind us of forgotten or overlooked values in Christianity. It must be can-

Consequence
of Eternity

dently recognized that the Hindu, for example, says the same thing of the values of Christianity. These Christian conceptions, he holds, are to be found too, now that he has begun to look for them, in his own sacred books. Well, the issue here is simply an issue of fact. And the Christian is ready to abide by it. He believes that all good is in Christ and that there is good in Christ that is nowhere else and he awaits with confidence the ultimate result of the comparison between Christ and the riches of Christ and all the values of the other religions.

4. These values are real values to the missionary enterprise in so far as they provide a meeting place of common accord. Here again we need to keep in mind the fact that the problem is not so much one of the comparison of systems as of the meeting of persons. And there must be some place where persons meet. The Christian and the Muslim meet in the truth of the unity and spirituality of God; the Christian and the Confucianist in the truth of the moral law as the will of Heaven. Without a meeting place how can two set off upon a common journey?

5. And these values are true values wherever they are the truth. Truth is truth wherever it is found. It belongs to and is part of Him who said, "I am the Truth." All goodness is God's goodness and all truth is God's truth. The Council rejoiced therefore in its Message to "recognize as part of the one Truth that sense of the Majesty of God and the consequent reverence in worship, which are conspicuous in Islam; the deep sympathy for the world's sorrow and unselfish search for the way of escape, which are at the heart of Buddhism; the desire for contact with Ultimate Reality conceived as spiritual, which is prominent in Hinduism; the belief in a moral order of the universe and consequent insistence on moral conduct, which are inculcated by Confucianism; the disinterested pursuit of truth and of human welfare which are often found in those who stand for secular civilization but do not accept Christ as their Lord and Saviour."

But when all this has been said it must be said also in the

interest of the truth itself that these values need to be honestly qualified.

THESE VALUES NOT A SUPPLEMENT TO CHRISTIANITY

These values are not a supplement to Christianity, as though, to borrow great words, Christ needed anything from any one. We find when we come with Christianity to the other religions of the world, and place Christianity in comparison with them, that Christianity has all the good of other religions. There is good and truth in these religions which we joyfully acknowledge, which has enabled them to survive and has given them their power, but there is no truth or good in them which is not found in a purer and fuller form in Christianity. Hinduism teaches the immanence of God; Mohammedanism the sovereignty of God; Buddhism the transitoriness and yet the solemn issues of our present life; Confucianism the dignity of our earthly relationships and of human society. But are not all these truths in Christianity also? It is so with whatever of good we find anywhere. To quote a missionary sonnet,

"We with reverent minds searching the lore
Of ancient days, find buried here and there
Fragments of precious truths and, piecing them
Again with reverent minds, construct a Form
And Body of the Truth—when lo! the whole
Grows to the likeness of our own dear Christ."

There is no truth anywhere which is not already in Christ, and in Christ in its fullest and richest form. Even the transformed Hinduism of the Vedanta offers only portions of what we already have in Him. As Mr. Slater says: "The Christian Gospel offers all that the Vedanta offers, and infinitely more. So true is it that every previous revelation flows into the revelation we have in Christ, and loses itself in Him. Christ includes all teachers. All 'other masters' are in Christ. We do not deny the truths they taught; we can delight in all. We can give heed to all the prophets; but every truth in every prophet melts into the truth we have in

Christ. And Christ tells us that life, not death, is what our souls are made for. That is His distinctive message to the non-Christian world. To be made one with the Divine, 'not in the dull abyss of characterless nonentity, lapsing from the personal down to the impersonal, from the animate to the inanimate, from the self back to the mere thing'; but in the reciprocal embrace of conscious love, mutually realized and enjoyed: that is the true and highest *bhakti-yoga*—knowing ever as we are known."

And not only are all the truths of the other religions in Christianity, but they are balanced and corrected as they are not in the non-Christian religions. Hinduism teaches that God is near, but it forgets that He is holy. Mohammedanism teaches that God is great, but forgets that He is loving. It knows that He is a King, but not that He is a Father. Buddhism teaches that this earthly life is fleeting, but it forgets that God sent us to do work, and that we must do it while it is day. Confucianism teaches that we live in the midst of a great framework of sacred relationships, but it forgets that in the midst of these we have a living help and a personal fellowship with the eternal God, in whose lasting presence is our home. What the other religions forget, or never knew, Christianity tells us in the fulness of its truth.

When men speak to-day, as it is well that they should, of the treasure of their racial or religious inheritance and its distinctive values and when the effort is made to state these in definite and precise terms it is invariably found that so far as they are values at all they are values of Christ, rays of His light, fragments of His wealth.

It must be recognized also that the values of a religion are not separable from its other elements and features, or from their place in the midst of their surrounding conditions and limitations. A truth may be but a half-truth, requiring a supplement which its content does not supply. It may be tied to error, intellectual or moral or social, which annuls its virtue. Furthermore, identity of language may cover wide diversity of essential ideas.¹ And also it is the unmistakable

¹ See: Morgan, William, *The Nature and Right of Religion*, pp. 22-4,

lesson of the history of religion that these values of the non-Christian systems are sterile. Truth that affects social character and life roots in personality. The unique power of Christianity is found not in its truth about God but in its true and living God, not in its true doctrine about Christ or from Christ about life but in Christ as Himself the Truth and the Life.

UNIQUENESS AND SUPERIORITY OF CHRISTIANITY

All this and much more needs to be kept in mind in determining the value of spiritual values, and especially in making comparison between Christianity and the other religions as the preliminary papers do, as indeed must inevitably be done in offering Christ and the Gospel to people who already have their own religious or secular views. The paper of the Swedish Missionary Council comments on this:

"It is useless to attempt a comparison on individual points and for various reasons: (a) The different religions are often incommensurable. What seems to be a corresponding idea may hold such different place and significance that an effort to compare them leads to violation. (b) Comparison often induces to injustice since one is often tempted to compare one's own ideal with the reality of the other religion. (c) In comparing one is generally tempted to overlook the subjectivity of the valuation, e.g., when it is stated that Christianity excels Buddhism by its activity. But what is it that proves activity to be superior? This is at the most our valuation. But if we were to carry on missions only in order to promote activity in the world, we might justly be blamed for trying to urge our own views on others. (d) Comparison on individual points easily leads to a consideration of Christianity from the point of view of quantity, to a valuation on the basis of relativity; (it has 'more' of a certain idea than other religions, it stands 'higher,' is 'better' than these).

on the different conceptions of redemption in Brahmanism and in Buddhism and the contrast between these conceptions and those of Christianity.

"Attention must rather be concentrated on the point of view of quality, on the central religious value of Christianity, and then with nothing else to present than the new relation to God through Christ. The gifts which missions have to bring to the non-Christian nations are Christ Himself, or, using the phraseology of St. Paul, the missionary, 'Jesus Christ and Him crucified'; the Cross, which proclaims the love of God—not to the righteous, but to sinners—and which is the love of God; God, who does not claim our sacrifices but sacrifices Himself and thereby regenerates us to live in Him.

"If missions seek to conquer the world for Him who came, not to be ministered unto but to minister and to sacrifice Himself, conquest and service are fused in one."

Here we have stated with simple Christian candor the fundamental assumption of Christian missions, the reasoned conclusion of comparative religion, and the plain fact of experience on which the new churches of the mission field and the faith and life of their members are built: namely, that with all the values fairly recognized and weighed, Christianity is better. Why should there be any hesitation about our saying this? It is exactly what the New Testament said regarding Judaism. It is the keynote of the Epistle to the Hebrews with its setting forth of "a better hope," "a better testament," "a better covenant," "better promises," "better sacrifices," "a better resurrection." If Christianity is not better than every other religion what right have we to offer it and on what rational or defensible ground do the new churches and the faith of their members rest?

In Its Ethical Essence

And not only is Christianity better: it is best. This is the firm declaration of the Message of the Council. Christ is unique and absolute. He is "God incarnate, the final, yet ever-unfolding, revelation of the God in whom we live and move and have our being." Christianity is unique and superior, its value is in a class above all other values in its ethical essence. As William Morgan says in his fresh and modern appraisal:

"What gives to Christianity its peculiar stamp is its radically ethical character. Christianity interprets life and interprets the universe in terms of the highest ethical values. While it does not fail to recognize the right of rationality and beauty, it is, above all, justice and mercy and love and truth that it establishes at the heart of being. It affirms all genuine values, giving the primacy to the ideal, and among the ideal to the moral; and so doing, it affirms the eternal worth of our human life and the eternal importance of our human tasks.

"In India we are confronted by a valuation fundamentally different. To the world of our experience and to human life as we know it on earth, all value is denied. The world, including separate personalities, is *Māyā*, illusion, and there is nothing real except Brahma. And what is Brahma? According to the Upanishad thinkers, he (or it) can be described only by negatives. If the idea has any positive content it is to be found in contemplative thought—that that is impersonal and free from all change and striving. Union with Brahma, which is the goal of redemption, comes through a series of disciplines calculated to detach the self from the world and all its interests, destroy the sense of separate individuality, and wither action at its source. The will to live being killed, the self, escaping from the law of *Karma* and the sorrowful, weary wheel of transmigration, enters Nirvana.

"This—so far as empirical existence is concerned—so pessimistic outlook Gautama inherited and made more explicit. In rejecting the idea of union with Brahma, he practically eliminated religion from his system, leaving his system a bare means of deliverance from the intolerable evil of life. His most valuable contribution was a body of moral teaching of singular elevation and his own high moral seriousness.

"In the later Buddhism the religious element was restored. Gautama himself became to his followers an object of religious veneration, and was even interpreted, in a way that reminds us of the Logos doctrine, as an effluence from the

eternal and all-pervading world-soul. More important religiously was the introduction of the idea of divine helpers called *Bodhisattvas*. These helpers are not, properly speaking, gods; they are men, who, ready for Nirvana, have renounced it in order to become the teachers and saviors of suffering humanity; but they exercise the functions of a god. To them the layman looks for salvation and hopes to join their ranks in the distant future. As a result of this development, a new emphasis is placed on the disposition of pity and love towards all creatures. In the older Buddhism a man's thoughts were mainly occupied with the task of winning his own deliverance from the sore cycle of birth, death, and rebirth.

"Although in this new or *Mahāyāna* Buddhism there are obvious points of contact with Christianity, the distance between the two religions is not substantially lessened. The pessimism with respect to life and its values, in which all the higher religion of India has its source, is not overcome. If the ethical is given a high place, in the last resort it holds this place only as a means to a redemption which transcends it. It is not as in Christianity established on the throne of being. The two religions rest on opposed valuations.

"With Judaism, Zoroastrianism, Platonism, and Islam Christianity has not a little in common. All can be described as more or less ethical religions. In conservative Judaism, however, so much is retained that is merely particularistic and national that its claim to universality is subject to serious deduction. Between liberal Judaism and Christianity the difference often narrows itself down to questions of speculative theology. Islam is only half ethical. Its God, notwithstanding the attributes of justice and mercy ascribed to him, is capricious and remorseless—the God of the relentless desert that holds you in its grip and may destroy you at any moment.

"Among all the religions that have appeared in history only of Christianity can it be said that it is fundamentally and consistently ethical. That is its greatness—that and

the fact that it has at the heart of it the supreme personality of Jesus. Have we any outlook beyond it?"

In Its Idea of God

Christianity is superior and unique and absolute in its idea of God. It "has such a conception of God as no other religion has attained; and what is more, it proclaims and brings to pass such an experience of God as humanity has never elsewhere known. . . . The God of Christianity is one, the sole source, Lord and end of all. He is holy, being in Himself the character that is the sole standard for all beings. He is love, reaching out to save the world from sin and fill it with His own goodness. He is wise, knowing how to accomplish His heart's desire. He is Father in heart, looking upon His creatures as His own and seeking their welfare. All this truth concerning Himself He has made known in Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the world, in whom His redemptive will has found expression and His saving love has come forth to all mankind. . . . The conception of God with which Christianity addresses the world is the best that man can form or entertain."¹

It is this transcendent superiority of the gift of God in Christ that warrants the missionary enterprise and justifies the men and women who have come to Christ from other religions in all lands. Christianity "has the right to offer itself boldly to all men, and to displace all other religions, for no other religion offers what it brings. . . . It is the best that the world contains. Because of its doctrine and experience of the perfect God, it is the best that the world can attain. Its contents can be unfolded and better known, but they cannot be essentially improved upon. At heart, Christianity is simply the revelation of the perfect God, doing the work of perfect love and holiness for His creatures, and transforming men into His own likeness, so that they will do the works of love and holiness toward their fellows. Than this nothing can be better. Therefore, Christianity has full

¹ Clarke, C.C., *A Study of Christian Missions*, Edinburgh, 1926, pp. 10, 11, 18.

right to be a missionary religion, and Christians are called to be a mission people."¹

THE CHRISTIAN TRADITION

No voices have ever proclaimed all this more convincingly than the voices of those who in their own life and experience have faced and answered the question of religious values. The biographies of these men and women are full of unanswerable personal testimony. It was such testimony that made the speeches of the women delegates at Jerusalem so convincing. The heavy emphasis of our time upon the principle of nationalism has led very naturally to a new tenacity of national and racial and religious traditions and to a tendency to glory in all that has entered into the national or racial past. There is something very worthy in this loyalty. But in the end the attitude of the true and whole-minded believer will doubtless be the same as St. Paul's. He was a Hebrew of the Hebrews, of the intellectual and spiritual aristocracy, possessor of all the spiritual values of Judaism. "But what things were gain to me those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord." This was Paul's attitude toward values. Dr. Nicol-Macnicol refers to this principle in moving language, which I venture to repeat, at the end of the supplement to his chapter on "Christianity and Hinduism":

"Finally, we need not, I think, stay to deal with questions of the continuity of Christianity in relation to Hinduism and of Christianity's superiority. Whether there is a gulf between the messages of the religions or not is a matter largely to be determined by the experience of the Hindu who has come to Christ, and his experience depends, in large measure, on whether he is what William James calls a twice-born man or a once-born one. Pandita Ramālai was aware of the deep waters to be crossed and of her need to be carried over them by the Divine Power; Narayan Vaman Tilak passed over, it may be, scarcely wetting his feet. But both

¹ Clarke, C.C., *A Study of Christian Missions*, pp. 19 ff.

would freely admit that the Divine Grace met them, and led or carried them across. And this, surely, is the key to the question of 'superiority.' The man of the West can never maintain that he has climbed further to God than the man of the East. The truth is wholly otherwise. But God has come to meet him all the way. God and the grace of God are in Christ as nowhere else in the universe. That we affirm. That seems to be what an Indian delegate pointed out in the discussion. 'The least in the Kingdom of Heaven'—the poorest creatures among us Christians of the West, poor in our lack of insight into religious truth compared with many Hindus, and in our lack of the natural *pietas*, the spirit of submission and acceptance, that is so often to be seen in them—'the least in the Kingdom of Heaven' who has obtained a glimpse of God as He is seen in the face of Christ Jesus is greater than any on whom that light has never shone. But it is a 'superiority' that can only humble him in the dust."

It is just this attitude of St. Paul's which was impossible for the pride of the Jews and it is hard for all racial pride to-day. As Edwyn Bevan wrote in a paper which the British delegation brought to Jerusalem:

"It is a very bitter saying for the Indians that 'salvation is of the Jews.' They are so sure that India has the primacy in things spiritual. They cling more passionately to such a belief because they feel humiliated by their political position. . . . But I am afraid for all peoples a genuine entrance into the Christian society means some painful sacrifice of pride, and we cannot make the narrow gate a wide one. Indians see plainly enough what a sacrifice of pride Englishmen have to make if they are going to be genuinely Christian, adopting the attitude of humble service instead of standing on their superior power. But Indians also have to make a great sacrifice of pride, if they are really going to bow to the Hebrew Jesus as the supreme Lord. The Jews, one might have thought, at any rate need not make such a sacrifice of pride; but they have to make perhaps the most painful of all. Salvation is of the Jews, but they have to

acknowledge that Judaism all these centuries has failed to see the salvation."

From his new Christian viewpoint Paul saw more clearly than the Jews the true spiritual values of their inheritance. Even so it is Christians who ought to see and appreciate all true spiritual values existing anywhere, and glory in them. It is a hard question of fact, however, as to whether the exaltation of these values helps men and women to come to Christ. In many cases it has done so. They have been drawn to Christ by finding in Him the many things they prize most in their perfect fulness. But on the other hand there are men and women who come to Him for what they have never found or known even in part. For these Mr. Macmurray and Mr. Bevan in the British papers set forth one aspect of missionary policy. Mr. Bevan wrote:

"One great question of principle is: How far should we present to non-Christian peoples what in Christianity is like their own traditions; how far what is unlike? There is a tendency in some quarters to recommend Christianity to the Indians by making it as like Hinduism as possible. On the other hand, it is just the elements in Christianity which are unlike anything else in Hinduism that Indians most need, as Tennyson said of his friend,

"'He supplied my want the more
That his unlikeness fitted mine.'"

And Mr. Macmurray said:

"There is first a general danger in comparing Christianity with other religions and picking out for emphasis what they have in common. That is all right in a university classroom, or in merely historical study. As a basis of policy it seems to me to be gratuitously weak. The essential question is to discover what Christianity has to give to the world that no other religion can give—in any degree. The difference has to be one of kind. Unless Christianity is essentially and radically different from other religions, unless there is some sense in which it is just right and they are just wrong, then there isn't much to be said for the missionary drive.

"One of the profoundest remarks which I have come across about religion is in Collingwood's *Speculum Mentis*. He says that religion reached its climax in Christ; and in doing so it ceased to be religion. Using religion in this sense—and it is the only sense in which it can be used when one studies comparative religion—he seems to me to be just right. Much that belongs to religion in this sense permeates what we call Christianity—both in doctrine, in spiritual outlook, and in organization. And I have a conviction that the points which the various world religions have in common with Christianity are in large measure the points which are not specifically Christian, but merely religious."

But our policy must take account of the others also, like Nehemiah Goreh and many another to whom Christ was not so much the overthrow and reversal as the fulfilment and completion. But here, too, there is a problem and a promise with regard to the values whose value we have been considering. Of the problem Mr. Bevan writes:

"Another great question is connected with the new elements brought into the Christian tradition by peoples who enter the Church with previous traditions of their own. This may be an enrichment of the Church; in our Western Christianity there are elements which the Church took over and incorporated from Greek and Roman culture. But such assimilation can be safe only when accompanied by a very active instinct of rejection. The Gnostics tried to combine Christianity with pagan Hellenistic religion, very much as some people would like to combine Christianity with Hinduism. And the Church had a life-and-death battle to expel Gnosticism. It may often be difficult to say whether some things which have come into the Christian tradition from outside are an enrichment or an adulteration. I think this applies to one element in the Christian tradition which Indians are apt to hail as specially akin—Christian mysticism. It is akin; it came into Christianity from the older Greek paganism, which, as we have seen, resembled Hinduism; it came from neo-Platonism by way of 'Dionysius the Areopagite' and got established in the tradition of

the medieval Church. Is it to be regarded as an enrichment or as an adulteration? It is sometimes said that a satisfactory commentary on St. John's Gospel could best be written by an Indian. No doubt an Indian Christian might write an admirable commentary, but I doubt whether his Indian tradition would not tend to mislead him as much as it helped him. St. John's Gospel, like all the Christian Scriptures, is Hebraic at the core."

III. THE REDEMPTION OF VALUES

The values of the old religions need conversion. They, too, must be washed in the blood of the Lamb, pass through the agony of the Cross, and rise again in the Resurrection.

And this is the promise. Only so can the old values survive. Mr. Chung's judgment is vivid and penetrating. He sees the ancient treasures already lost. And Mr. Macmurray has put this in striking words:

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 "These religions are going to be smashed anyhow, perhaps not quickly, but surely, and what is going to do it—indeed is already doing it—is modern science, modern commerce, and modern political organization. These are the things that the East wants from us; and on the whole it does not want our Christianity. It will have them and they will destroy its religions, its customs, and its social organizations. It doesn't seem to me to be really worth while to attempt to save from the wreck what seems to us good and valuable in the older non-Christian civilizations. Why all this archæologism? When the old systems of life have become a mere memory—as Rome and Greece have for us,—then all that is of permanent value in them will be ripe and available for educational purposes. At the moment the good and the bad are so thoroughly intertwined, so unified in a common concrete way of life, that the destruction of the system must precede the rescue of its valuable elements."

But the time element is not so sharply edged. The movement is a living process. Christianity enshrines in its present forms a great deal that it took over from the thought

and life which it met in the world. It is now to repeat this work of redemption. The values of the non-Christian religions are to be salvaged by the grace of Christ and baptized into Him. Only so can they survive. Their value, like all other values, is as material for Him that the works of God may be manifested in the world.

CONVERSION



by a German ecumenist

Paul Löffler



by an Evangelical Mennonite

David A. Shank

Joseph B. Bustillos
MT 533: Theology of Religious Encounter
March 1, 1985

good

Essay Review: Conversion, by Paul Loffler.

Dr. Loffler begins his essay with a statement pertaining to the centrality of the concept of conversion and the broad understanding of the concept as it is perceived among the various Christian traditions. He concludes his introductory remarks with a series of questions meant to bring to light the concept of conversion with reference to the theme of the World Council of Churches Fourth Assembly ("Behold, I make all things new"). His questions are: "To what extent does the transformation of society depend on a 'new man'? What kind of commitment does it require? How do personal destiny and that of mankind interrelate?" (p. 250).

In the next section ("Conversion in an Ecumenical Context") Loffler notes: "As a term and as a concept it is surrounded by misunderstandings which block the way for dialogue between the different traditions on a point of substance." He further writes: "If an ecumenical discussion of conversion is to be successful it must take a wider approach and first explore the meaning of conversion in the different Christian traditions." (p. 253). He then briefly sketches the conversion histories of Paul the Apostle, Justin Martyr, Augustine, Luther, John Wesley and Francis of Assisi, noting the inability to use any of these case histories as a definitive example for what is meant by "conversion."

Even such a brief review of conversion histories throughout the centuries shows beyond doubt that there does not exist one mode of conversion. . . . In each case we observe, however, two vital elements which are common to all patterns: In every case there is a personal element in conversion and it is closely related to entry into or rediscovery of the Community of the Church. (255) ✓

For the balance of his article he develops the Biblical and Existential factors in "Conversion" as a personal act and an act within Community.

In reading this essay I had some reservation about what was going to befall the term "conversion" (just having the words "World Council of Churches" on the by-line had me fear for the eventual demise of the poor term in the Sheol of Ambiguous Double-talk). Fortunately that did not seem to be the case this time. He pointed out the Personal/Christological/Forward Moving/Relational/Kingdom/Eschatological/Creation aspects of the concept in the Biblical witness. In presenting his final comments with reference to the present situation that the Church finds itself he writes:

To restate the meaning of person in the contemporary context is one of the urgent tasks for all churches. . . It must include a self-critical attitude towards an over-emphasis on the individual in Protestantism as well as towards the disregard of personal freedom in other traditions. The Old and New Testament concepts of conversion point to a biblical anthropology which takes every person seriously as a unique part in God's history with man, and yet always sees the individual as part of the whole of mankind by whose destiny and future his own is encompassed. . . Faced with the impossibility to remain the integrating force of society and with the impending danger of withdrawal into the private sphere of a minority ghetto, the Church is challenged to examine afresh the meaning of conversion. (pp. 259-260)

For what he seems to be writing I find myself very much in agreement (something tells me that things are not all that they seem to be, but if the liberals can make them "Corban" than we Evangelicals can read into this the Biblical truths that seem self-evident to us). ✓

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CONVERSION

Introduction by PAUL LÖFFLER *

Christian Faith of any persuasion involves some form of 'conversion.' It belongs to its very nature that it calls for response to God's presence in history, for personal commitment and human participation. The new reality given in Christ must find its expression in a change from an old to a new existence. Ever since the calling of the first disciples by the Lake of Galilee we find that throughout Christian history the reality of 'conversion' is creating and recreating the Church, underlying its life and mission. Some times it erupts into famous instances: the 'conversion' of St. Paul, St. Justin, St. Augustine, St. Francis of Assisi, Luther, Wesley. Always it is there as a force of renewal in both the Church and society.

The verbal expression of that reality has differed and varies from tradition to tradition. To the Orthodox Churches the term 'salvation' is more familiar than 'conversion.' The latter has been frequently used by the Protestant Missionary Movement. Hence it carries certain undertones which can lead to confusion. We have nevertheless continued to use the term 'conversion' in this issue as a shorthand expression for a biblical concept which is universally acknowledged. It represents the Old Testament notion of 'turn' and 're-turn' (*shuv*), Christ's call to repentance and discipleship as well as the divine promise "to make all things new."

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Starting from the biblical evidence we can say that the accepted meaning of 'conversion' is personal reorientation. While 'evangelism' is concerned with the re-presentation of God's acts in history,¹ 'conversion' is about the human response. Both deal with man's participation in the *missio dei*. The form of the response does not follow, and never has followed, one universal pattern or model. It must obviously vary for instance with those who have been 'born into the Church' and those who belong to a different religion or do not hold any religious views. We know of 'mass-conversion' and individual response. In short it is extremely difficult to give a more precise definition of 'conversion' which would be widely acceptable.²

Our overriding interest in any case is not a verbal redefinition of 'conversion' but a theological probing into its reality and significance in the different societies, and Christian traditions today. Has 'conversion' any new or remaining relevance? Is it a point of substance of the Christian Faith which must be introduced or re-introduced into the ecumenical discussion? What are the points at which there is substantial disagreement between the Christian traditions and, more important, at what points must they complement and correct each other? A fully ecumenical restatement of the concept of conversion can only happen as a result of such a process of common study and discussion rather than at its beginning.

The importance of the task is obvious for several reasons. As the World Council of Churches moves towards its Fourth Assembly on the theme "Behold, I make all things new" it becomes clear that neither the renewal of the world nor of the Church can be adequately understood without the reorientation of people as persons. In meeting some of the most dramatic crises of the modern world signified by the struggle for a juster economic and social order among the nations we are again challenged to show how exactly such changes can come about: to what extent does the transformation of society depend on a 'new man'? What kind of commitment does it require? How do personal destiny and that of mankind interrelate?

¹ Another Issue of the Ecumenical Review in the near future will specifically deal with 'evangelism.' Its consideration has therefore been omitted here.

² The traditional definition by William James in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* that conversion denotes "the process, gradual or sudden, by which a self hitherto divided, and consciously wrong, inferior and unhappy, becomes unified and consciously right, superior and happy, in consequence of its firmer hold upon religious realities" we regard as too narrow a base for ecumenical discussion.

What is behind the current revival of interest in conversion? That such a revival is happening cannot be disputed. During the past decade an impressive array of books has been published on the subject.¹ Ecumenically the Central Committee of the WCC recognized its importance at the meeting in Enugu, Nigeria.² In a different context the World Conference on Church and Society dealt with conversion in connection with social change.³ Implicitly conversion is an issue involved in the thinking about structures for missionary congregations. Do they depend on Christians committed to mission in the world? It is of course also at the heart of the work of the Division of World Mission and Evangelism. Such signs of the revival of interest at the ecumenical level are paralleled by several national events. A nation-wide conference on the Mission of the Church in contemporary India concluded last year: "The cross of Jesus Christ which is the centre of the history of the world and of the life of the Church constitutes a call to all men without exception to be converted to God."⁴ This is said in full awareness of a new situation: "In India today men see in economic planning, development and the use of technology a new hope for man, lifting him from his present economic state to a higher standard of living (ibid.)." But precisely because of these expectations the question is raised what resources are required to fulfil them. The report states: "The fact of the cross reminds us of the deep alienation of all men for God, and therefore when Jesus announced the coming of God's Kingdom he called men at the same time to a radical revolution, in their thinking, to repentance and conversion (ibid.)."

I. Conversion as an ecumenical problem

Last year's first Faith and Order Colloquium in the United States chose conversion as its main topic for a different reason: "It was decided to

¹ We draw attention to the following: JOOST DE BLANK, 'This is Conversion,' London, 1957; DOUGLAS WEBSTER, 'What is Evangelism?', London 1959; WILLIAM BARCLAY, 'Turning to God,' London 1963; Stephen Smalley, 'Conversion in the New Testament,' in *The Churchman*, Vol. 78, No. 3, September 1964; JOHN BAILLIE, 'Baptism and Conversion,' Oxford 1964; H. J. SCHULTZ, 'Conversion in the World,' London 1967; 'Religious Conversion' in *Religion and Society*, Vol. XIII/4, Bangalore, 1966, and to other publications specifically referred to later.

² Dr. ADEGBOLA's lecture with several comments has been published in *Study Encounter* "Secularization and Conversion," Vol. I, No. 2.

³ See article by E. CASTRO referred to in footnote 3 of Introduction.

⁴ From the "Findings" published by the National Christian Council of India, 1966, pp. 10-13.

center attention on the subject 'the meaning and practices of conversion' ... because conversion presents itself as an ecumenical problem. The term 'conversion' carries many meanings and operates in the field of the Church's mission demanding crucial choices. It may mean (1) change to a belief in Jesus Christ, (2) change from one Christian body to another or from one religion to another, (3) change from dead or nominal Christian adherence to a vibrant, personal faith...⁵

Here then lies a first clue why conversion has emerged as a topical subject for ecumenical discussions. **As a term and as a concept it is surrounded by misunderstandings which block the way for dialogue between the different traditions on a point of substance.** A document of the World Council of Churches Department on the Laity summed up the situation a few years ago: "Up till now little or nothing has been done specifically in the ecumenical movement to involve the churches in frank conversation about this subject of conversion. Those who want to speak about it have been too easily dismissed as 'pietists'; but they themselves have too quickly identified their own conception of conversion with what the Bible calls the 'turning around' and 'the change of mind.'"⁶

If an ecumenical discussion of conversion is to be successful it must take a wider approach and first explore the meaning of conversion in the different Christian traditions. The Orthodox tradition for instance knows the term 'convert' — it has a special office for receiving converts into the Church — but its use is primarily connected with the actual entry of a schismatic or heretic Christian as well as a pagan into Church membership. But there exists a much more significant and deeper strand of Orthodox tradition connected with theological thinking on the *imago Dei*, transfiguration and the nature of the Church.⁷

In a similar way the meaning of conversion in the Roman Catholic Church is closely related to baptism and entry into the Church. The chief difference lies in the more juridical and institutional definition of Church compared with Orthodox ecclesiology. In 'Christian countries' where members are 'born' into the Church the use of the term 'conversion' is thus reduced to 'change from one Christian body to another.' In 'mission countries' conversion is of course an acknowledged phenomenon, but its meaning becomes submerged in that of baptism.

⁵ Quoted in 'Faith and Order Trends,' NCCCUA, Vol. 6/4, September 1966, p. 3.

⁶ H. R. WEBER in Editorial to Document No. VIII, *Conversion: a Contemporary Study*, by R. McGlashan, WCC Dept. on the Laity, 1960. In the following part some of R. McGlashan's material is used.

⁷ Cf. Prof. NISSIOTIS's article in this issue.

On the Protestant side there is no one understanding of conversion, although the term is more widely accepted in general. For the Reformers the issue arose as part of the concern for the renewal of the Church and more specifically in the context of 'election.'⁸ The underlying theme is that of how to secure 'certainty of faith' and the stress lies on God's part in converting man. 'Pietism' and the subsequent revival movements share with the Reformation the same concern for 'certainty of faith.' The theological emphasis, however, is decisively shifted to the personal affirmation in response to God's work and to the subjective assurance of salvation. Hence we find now an understanding of conversion which focusses on a personal religious experience, and the element of individual decision.

It is this understanding which has become the familiar one and through the Protestant Missionary Movement also the widest known. The Christian group in which conversion is probably most alive today, the Pentecostal movement, shares some of this understanding. For Pentecostals conversion is the crisis in the person's life through which the Holy Spirit transforms him into a new man. The experience itself is often charged with highly emotional or even ecstatic feelings, which can find dramatic expression in acts of visible and audible repentance.

Some famous conversion histories

Quite parallel to the variety of interpretations given to conversion is the diversity of conversion histories. Throughout the centuries of the Christian Church we come across famous instances of conversion. To begin with, Paul's dramatic experience near Damascus which transformed him from a foe of Jesus Christ into his dedicated follower is often called the 'conversion of St. Paul.' But according to I. Cor. 15. 3 ff. this encounter through which Paul is called to apostleship is the last appearance of the risen Christ and must be regarded as an event *sui generis* which was unique.

Justin the Martyr came to the Christian Church through an intellectual quest.⁹ He began his search after truth by exploring Stoicism, then turned to a Peripatetic philosopher, who was followed by a Pythagorean

⁸ The 'Westminster Confession,' for instance, avoids the term 'conversion' but speaks of 'the effectual calling' as God's work whereby 'he draws to Jesus Christ' (Question 67, Westminster Larger Catechism).

⁹ Cf. A. D. Nock's study of *Conversion* from Alexander the Great to Augustine of Hippo, Oxford University Press, 1933, and G. BARDY, *La Conversion au Christianisme durant les premiers siècles*, Aubier, Paris, 1947.

and finally a Platonist. Justin's conversion occurred at the end of a long and disappointing intellectual process. It was not sudden, but well prepared, although the final revelation has the quality of a radical reorientation about it.

Augustine of Hippo in turn describes his own conversion as a dramatic experience. The critical moment in his life when he heard the voice in the garden and discovered Romans 13. 13 seems like a sudden turn. Yet his own autobiography reveals that a long process of protest and maturing precedes that moment. Augustine was, because of his mother, really born into Christianity. He tried to turn away from it. This conversion represents the culmination of a long struggle to come to terms with it.

Luther, like Augustine, was born into the Christian Faith. In fact he followed its path obediently and with consistency. His famous 'conversion experience' (if it can be called that) in the tower room at Wittenberg, most certainly did not mean a turning to God. Its momentum comes from a new insight into the nature of grace and forgiveness. It brought him the personal certainty of a deepened faith and meant thus assurance rather than re-orientation.

John Wesley in turn was strongly influenced by Luther. As in the case of Luther, his conversion represented an emotional experience. But it did not mean a radical turning. Its effect can perhaps be best described as an 'integrating' one. The experience did not add anything materially new to his knowledge of the Christian Faith, but it related crucial insights to him personally.

Even such a brief review of conversion histories throughout the centuries shows beyond doubt that there does not exist one mode of conversion. On the contrary, we became aware of the variety of factors, religious and cultural, which have influenced each particular history. Different patterns occur and recur. There is the pattern of the 'searcher after truth' (Justin), the 'protest pattern' (Augustine), or we find conversion as an 'integrating experience' (Luther, Wesley). One could mention others, not reported here, like the *imitatio Christi* pattern of St. Francis of Assisi. In each case we observe, however, two vital elements which are common to all patterns: In every case there is a personal element in conversion and it is closely related to entry into or rediscovery of the Community of the Church. It runs like a red thread through all accounts that conversion is an intensely personal event. The second element seems to be less obvious with those who already belonged to the Christian

Church. Yet it can be seen that the immediate consequences of conversion for instance for both Luther and Wesley were that they were brought out of their isolation into a new fellowship with other Christians.

These two essential elements in all case histories of conversion correspond to two dominant trends which we observed in the survey of the interpretation of conversion in different traditions. On the one hand we registered an identification of the concept of conversion with entry into the Church (and its equation with baptism). On the other hand we found the emphasis on conversion a personal experience, as a decisively individual event. The evidence of Church history proves that these two poles of conversion cannot be regarded as alternatives. An intertraditional study of conversion thus helps to restate it in an ecumenical context holding together two emphases which belong together in much of our common Christian tradition.

H. Fresh biblical thinking on conversion

The 'ecumenical' argument is reinforced, modified and carried further by the biblical evidence. Fresh thinking and new scholarly work compel us to go back to the very sources of the concept of conversion in the biblical theology. A long use and misuse of the term, as well as the rather basic challenge to a traditional understanding of conversion, which comes from the ecumenical discussion, explain the need for a re-study of the biblical concept *in toto*; although a study of conversion is complicated by the fact that there is no one word in the Old and New Testaments which covers the whole concept.¹⁰ There is a good deal of consistency in biblical theology which makes it possible to state a few points categorically:

1) Conversion is a personal reorientation towards God. We can undoubtedly observe a process of progressive personalization of conversion from the strictly collective covenantal use of re-turn by the early prophets, through the later Old Testament materials like Psalm 51 to the New Testament with its reference to particular persons. The disciples are called by name. God's action in history demands concrete response by historic persons. But this must not be misunderstood individualistically. Christ does not happen to have met a number of individuals who get converted and accidentally add up to twelve. It is the other way round: he calls twelve men because they have been designated to become the new Israel, the nucleus of a new humanity.

¹⁰ Cf. biblical not this issue.

2) The urgency of conversion does not derive from the psychological needs of the human personality, nor from the individual's requirement to make a particular decision or to go through a particular experience. The only New Testament basis of conversion is the Christological one. Most definitely in the Pauline theology conversion and baptism are tightly interlocked with the death and resurrection of Christ. Through the coming of Jesus Christ the re-orientation to God attains a new meaning and historicity. In the Old Testament the context of conversion is the re-turn to the covenant. In the New Testament it simply means to follow Christ, a commitment to discipleship in the historic context of incarnation.

3) As in the Old Testament, conversion is, in the first instance, commitment to and participation in a dynamic movement forward. But in a second (not secondary) way it means also at the same time liberation from the past and from the forces and powers of evil. In the Old Testament the prophetic call to conversion always includes an emphatic "No!" to idolatry. In the New Testament conversion sets men free to a new life in Christ. It is acceptance of forgiveness, based on obedience of faith. Such liberation has not only to do with sins, the moral wrong and evil deeds of men, it equally concerns the forces of society and the cosmic powers of the universe.

4) Conversion always involves a vertical response. It does not primarily refer to an affirmation of metaphysical beliefs but to concrete obedience and a renewed relationship with one's neighbour. What the prophets expect of Israel are concrete acts of obedience such as renouncing military power or giving up particular idols. This line continues clearly in the New Testament where at every point the reality of conversion is tested by service to man and society.

5) The beginning of the Kingdom through Christ's entry into human history is the main context of conversion in the New Testament. The triune God is thus the author of every aspect of conversion, just as the Kingdom is His. The universal significance of the Kingdom means that the call to conversion is now explicitly linked with the commission to preach 'to all nations' (Luke 24. 47; Acts 2. 38 etc.). Just as the prophets expound Israel's destiny within that of the nations, conversion is concerned with the destiny of all men. In the New Testament the universal dimension of conversion is fully drawn out. The Kingdom represents a reality which is moving towards the future and the end of time. It leads to the restoration of the whole cosmos, to the renewal of all things.

With it conversion shares that eschatological character. It is not an end in itself but the beginning of a re-creation which must ultimately comprise *ta panta*.

III. The contemporary context

A third factor behind the revival of interest in conversion is the pressure of contemporary events. Their attack on the traditional concept of conversion is another strong force for re-thinking. The attacks come from three sides: from a new self-understanding of men; from the new pluralistic religious world situation, and finally from secularizing forces. All three together often combine in a devastating assault which seems to leave little prospect for the possibility of conversion in our world today. Since Sigmund Freud shook the very foundations of the psychological make-up of man, conversion ceased to be a merely theological subject. It came under scrutiny by psychologists, anthropologists and social scientists. It is quite true that this attack on the integrity of conversion has lost some of its original sweeping certainty. We are witnessing a come-back of interest in conversion as a scientifically respectable subject.¹¹ Phenomena like the power of persuasion generated by mass media (*The Hidden Persuaders*) or the ideological battle of the mind ('brain-washing') indicate that there are forces at work which need to be taken more seriously. The very meaning of person itself is challenged and with it the integrity of conversion.

The second attack gathers its strength from an increasingly pluralistic religious situation. During the last decades we have witnessed a remarkable renaissance of some of the great old religions, like Hinduism and Buddhism, as well as the rise of new religious movements like Sōka-Gakkai in Japan and of new variations of ancient cults like Voodoo in the Caribbean or the Cargo cult in the Pacific. One has to add to that the existence of powerful ideological systems since the beginning of the industrial revolution, the revival of humanism and existentialism. In such a situation the goal of the early ecumenical movement to evangelize the world in this generation seems like a far cry. Religious pluralism, however, questions not only the viability, but the very possibility of the conversion of all people to Christ. As it creates a situation of open syncretism in which all traditions and religions become a source of truth

for the individual, and as it results in synthetic systems of belief which are inclusive rather than exclusive, the consequences are that conversion seems to be no longer a real possibility for the majority of people.

Finally, one even more serious attack in the long run on conversion comes from secularization.¹² We realize of course that there is no agreement on what is actually meant by secularization. But whatever it may mean in detail, there can be no doubt about the direction of the process through which more and more areas of thought are withdrawn from religious control. As a universal phenomenon secularization no longer appears primarily as an anti-clerical or anti-religious movement. However, it does continue as a process which asserts the ultimate autonomy of all areas of life within the terms they offer. It thus creates a climate of thought which is this-worldly, pragmatic and profane. Beyond that secularization assumes an interpretation of reality which includes the potential mastery of the world, the manageability of all human relations and a contextual interpretation of truth. A call to conversion which is based on mere historical experience and supra-historic principles, and is presented entirely in religious terms, is not likely to make any impact under these circumstances.

The questioning of conversion in the contemporary situation which comes at least from these three sides is obviously so considerable that it would be presumptuous to answer it briefly. In a way the whole of our present theological debate ties in here. Yet the 'ecumenical rediscovery' of conversion and the fresh insights into its biblical concept indicate some of the crucial tasks which lie ahead.

(1) To re-state the meaning of person in the contemporary context is one of the urgent tasks for all churches. If belief in a personal God and in man as a person are central to the Christian faith, it must stand or fall with the authenticity and dynamic of its concept of person. After Freud such an exercise of re-examination can only happen in dialogue with the social sciences and through unreserved participation in the agonies of modern man to find himself. It must include a self-critical attitude towards an over-emphasis on the individual in Protestantism as well as towards the disregard of personal freedom in other traditions. The Old and New Testament concepts of conversion point to a biblical anthropology which takes every person seriously as a unique partner in God's history with man, and yet always sees the individual as part of the whole

¹¹ Cf. paper by Douglas and Scroggs in this issue.

¹² Cf. the more detailed analysis by Bishop Wickham in this issue.

of mankind by whose destiny and future his own is encompassed. Conversion stories acknowledge the cultural and social factors which form part of the person's history and make up. The freedom of man as a person is not based on abstract theories of choice but on his power to respond to God's given acts in history and to the reality of His presence in the world. Conversion signifies this possibility of commitment to partnership with God as the very essence of being a person.

(2) To re-define the role of the Church as the community of those who have visibly responded through conversion is an equally vital task. Faced with the impossibility to remain the integrating force of society and with the impending danger of withdrawal into the private sphere of a minority ghetto, the Church is challenged to examine afresh the meaning of conversion. The biblical evidence makes clear that conversion lies at the very root of the Church's existence. Yet it also determines the Church's role as that of a *pars pro toto*. Conversion is no end in itself, but a representative response by some on behalf of all men leading to the exemplary realization of the Kingdom. Its criteria are not the saving of one's soul nor the increase of church membership as such, but rather the mission and ministry of the Church in the world.

(3) To relate conversion as a personal event and as a commitment to social responsibility is a third important task. We cannot separate conversion to God from service of man. Both happen in one and the same act. The reality of the Kingdom expresses itself primarily in transformed relationship with God and neighbours. Conversion requires a neighbour because there exists no change of heart apart from a change of all relationships. Dr. Castro, therefore, rightly concludes: "We shall be able to measure the reality of our conversion by the extent of our involvement in the struggle for social justice and the detachment with which we move in the midst of the prevailing social systems."¹³ This includes today the organisational structures of society. It calls, for instance, for international Christian action and a 'theology of development' as a life and death issue for all nations. But the Church's participation in society must be determined by the creative tension between the renewal of man as a person and of the structures of society, between revolution in the life of a nation and in the life of individuals. 'Conversion' identifies that very tension.

¹³ EMILIO CASTRO: *Conversion and Social Transformation in Christian Societies in a Changing World*, New York and London, 1966, p. 364.

V. good

Joseph Bustillos
MT 533: Theology of Religious Encounter
March 1, 1985

Essay Review: Towards an Understanding of Christian Conversion,
by David A. Shank.

Shank begins his investigation into the meaning of conversion by echoing Loffler's¹ concern that the "Pauline"-Lutheran paradigm is an insufficient expression of the concept. Shank develops a Salvation "From X, To Y" motif that is better focused and more Christological in its basis than Loffler's.

He presents his "From X, To Y" conversion as being in opposition to the common modern preoccupation with having a "Religious Experience."

The modern understanding of conversion emphasizes the psychological and affective aspects of inner experience (emotional, release, feeling, self-consciousness) as over against the biblical accent on reversal of direction, transfer of loyalty, and change in commitment. It is this latter biblical emphasis on what Nock calls "a new life in a new people" which should orient our understanding of conversion.²

He continues:

But it is not enough just to turn from the past to **any** future; rather it is from the past judged by God to that future offered by God in and through the Messiah. This Messiah Jesus, interpreted throughout all of the New Testament as the **Servant (Ebed, in Hebrew)-Messiah**, and even more as the **suffering** Servant-Messiah of the Servant-songs in the Isaiah writings, is "to establish justice in the earth (42:2)."³

From here he develops his Servant-Messiah and the Servant-community themes. Both of these themes are used to maintain a Christological focus and yet a theology that is supremely sensitive to the Sitz em Leben of the individual convert. The Servant-community is meant to safeguard against syncretism.

Not all "justification" is Christ-centered, if we review it in the community of the Spirit of the suffering Servant who as Lord fulfills history with "the almighty meekness of the Lamb." Nor is all election Christ-centered, in the **Ebed** sense of the word, even if the word "Christ" is used. But neither is all solidarity, nor liberation, nor blackness, nor openness.⁴

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Using his Ebed/Servant-Messiah/Servant-community and "From/To" motifs he acknowledges the personal nature of conversion but also maintain that it is primarily a "call to follow and become a disciple."⁵ This should be taken as a note of warning to our beloved separatist brothers that a "just Jesus and me, everything is okay with just Jesus and me" mentality. The doctrinal purity they so desire to preserve may be lost like some ancient cuneiform text, or worst yet may lose the key to its proper translation (the ministry of Christ in His Church).⁶ ✓

FOOTNOTES

¹Paul Loffler, "Conversion" The Ecumenical Review, Vol 19, Number 3, July '67, pp. 549-260.

²David A. Shank, "Towards an Understanding of Christian Conversion" Mission-Focus, Vol 5, Number 2, November '76, p. 33.

³Shank, p. 34.

⁴Shank, p. 36.

⁵Shank, p. 32.

⁶I may not believe in the Magisterium of the Church but I sure hate the "lone-ranger" mentality that finds its beginning and ending in the conversion of a sinner and rejection of all other existence ("to hell with the Church and its history," they seem to be saying). ✓

FOR MISSION LEADERS

MISSION-FOCUS

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TOWARDS AN UNDERSTANDING OF CHRISTIAN CONVERSION

David A. Shank

Introduction

Ex-opera singer N. "came to Christ" out of total suicidal despair; somehow she understood that there was hope for her in Christ. Teenage A., in conflict with his family, "came to Christ" in his search for personal identity and for an "absolute" to which he could commit himself. Middle-class "riser" L. "came to Christ" out of a deep need to replace a religious system that for him was neither adequate or consistent.

Each of these persons in a different context perceived what it meant to be "outside of Christ." What they had in common was their conversion to Christ as known in the common life of the same congregation. Each had turned from a previous condition to what was a consciously different life in a new community; yet the so-called Pauline experience of law and grace (Romans 7), or the Lutheran experience of condemnation and justification by faith was not an obvious functional part of their conversions. How do we understand conversion?

The "Pauline"-Lutheran paradigm of conversion has colored traditional Protestant understanding. The style and message of evangelism and mission have consciously sought to effect conversion as defined by a particular mental and spiritual context. This is not, however, the paradigm that we find in the gospels where there is a call to follow and become a disciple. Neither is it the paradigm of the Old Testament, nor that of the Book of the Acts. And yet in the Old Testament, Gospels and Acts, as well as the rest of the non-Pauline authors, conversion is considered absolutely essential to salvation. Thus A. D. Nock in his classic study of conversion in the first Christian centuries¹ points out that it is something found uniquely within the prophetic tradition of the Hebrew and Christian faiths. Other religions had adherents who "used" the

religious thought, or system, or celebration, or priest without being wholly committed in faith to them; nor were they expected to be. Judaism and Christianity, however, "demanded a new life in a new people."

Judaism was oriented by the monotheistic, anti-idolatrous, and strongly ethical orientation which contrasted with contemporary religious climate. Hebrew youth knew when they were integrated into the covenant with God that a different community was their home. Christianity was centered in the Lordship of a Saviour Christ whose Kingdom was based on his death, resurrection, and coming judgment. Nock points to the novelty in "the motive which it supplied for good conduct and the abhorrence of past bad conduct which it demanded. [It was] devotion to Jesus who had suffered so that sinlessness might be within man's reach and . . . love of the brethren, altogether more lively and far-reaching in Christianity." Further, "it claimed to give power to satisfy its requirements; . . . grace . . . and the special gift of the Spirit."²

Biblical Materials

The Jewish and Christian communities were constituted by conversion, which is essentially a "turning from and turning to."

With Abraham it was from "country and kindred and father's house" to "a land that I will show you" ("he looked forward to the city which has foundations whose builder and maker is God," Heb. 11:10).

With Moses and Israel in Egypt, it was from "sitting with the fleshpots and eating bread to the full . . . and dying in service to the Egyptians" to "going into the wilderness to serve Jahweh."

With Caleb and Joshua it was to have been **from** "dying in the wilderness" to "receiving from the Lord a land which flows with milk and honey." But conversion was refused. So they died. . . .

With Samuel it was an appeal to convert **from** "a king to govern us like all the nations" to "Jahweh's being king over them." But conversion was refused. So they were given a king. . . .

Jesus' own appeal was the conversion **from** "an evil and unbelieving generation" to "the kingdom of God [which] is at hand." That conversion response was typified by Peter: "Lo, we have left everything and followed."

Peter's appeal, on the occasion of the coming of the Holy Spirit, was **from** "this crooked generation" to "forgiveness and . . . the gift of the Holy Spirit [in] . . . devotion to the apostle's teaching, and fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayer . . . (and no one said that any of the things which he possessed was his own) . . ."

Should we have mentioned Elijah on Mt. Carmel, and the appeals of Jeremiah (3:2; 32:40), Ezekiel (e.g. 18:30), Joel (2:12f) where the prophetic thrust is on **re-turning to God** with whom they are in covenant relation?

And should we make more explicit the specific context of the exceptional kind of conversion of Saul of Tarsus in his turning **from** being a "circumcised Benjamite Hebrew, Pharisee zealous to the point of heretic hunting, and blameless in righteousness under the law" to "knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, and [being] found in Him with a righteousness of God through faith in Christ?"

It is ever again the crucial response of "turning around" in repentance (most often **metanola** in Greek), or "turning" or "re-turning" to covenant with God (**shubh** and its derivatives in Hebrew—a verb of motion) that determines a future of salvation for Israel and the nations in the fulfillment of God's purposes. The shift **from** "away from God in judgment of death and destruction" to "with God and His righteousness in the salvation of life and peace, and fellowship in the Kingdom" is at the heart of conversion reality. Here there is neither ambivalence nor ambiguity; only an either/or possibility.

Biblical Versus Modern Understanding

The word "conversion" itself is used only once in the Revised Standard Version of the New Testament. When

Paul and Barnabas passed through Phoenicia and Samaria enroute to Jerusalem, they reported "the **conversion** of the gentiles" (Acts 15:3), the main subject of the Jerusalem conference. There James spoke of that same reality as the "Gentiles who **turn to God**." Where the 1611 King James version translated "to convert," the RSV most often uses "to turn." The modern understanding of conversion emphasizes the psychological and affective aspects of inner experience (emotion, release, feeling, self-consciousness) as over against the biblical accent on reversal of direction, transfer of loyalty, and change in commitment. It is this latter biblical emphasis on what Nock calls "a new life in a new people" which should orient our understanding of conversion.

Biblical conversion is typified in the story of Jonah's ministry at Nineveh. Jesus used it as a type of His own ministry. A whole population of the capital city of an empire was so wicked in its greatness that it was brought to the bar of the universal judge. He responds to the case with a call addressed to a prophet to "go and cry against it." When Jonah answers finally, the Lord sends him to "proclaim to it the message that I tell you," more specifically the overthrow of the city within forty days.

Scripture reports that the people believed God, proclaimed a fast and put on sackcloth. Under the numinous impact of the word of judgment, they became as nothing. In reality this was a self-imposed "overthrow" in response to God's presence as experienced in the ministry of Jonah. Ultimately, the king himself in sackcloth and ashes proclaimed a dry fast for man and beast as total response to God: "'Let them cry mightily to God; yea, let every one turn from his evil way, and from the violence which is in his hands. Who knows, God may yet repent and turn from his fierce anger, so that we perish not?' When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God repented of the evil which he had said he would do to them; and he did not do it" (Jonah 3:8-10).

Faithfulness to the Word of the Lord through Israel's unwilling prophet changes history because it results in the temporal salvation of a city normally seen to be outside of God's covenant with Israel. Because a people turn collectively **from** wickedness and violence to God, He in His holy freedom turns **from** anger and judgment to pity and mercy. His turning is salvation; theirs is conversion and . . . salvation.

Here, then, is the type of Jesus' own ministry. Foreseeing the destruction of Jerusalem, He knows that it is possible to save it; Nineveh is the precedent. He proclaims the imminence of the kingdom of God (judgment and salvation) and the call to repent—a massive appeal to turn to God, to conversion, even to the extent of sending out of seventy apostles to all the cities. If

Jerusalem would not turn, the coming of the kingdom of God could only mean judgment and destruction. The Ninevite salvation only heightens Jesus' sense of outrage at His own people, who refuse His appeal. He sees the Jonah-converted Assyrians among the accusing witnesses of the Judgment Day who will condemn Israel for refusing to turn to God when invited by one "greater than Jonah" (Matt. 12:40f).

As Peter so boldly pointed out at Pentecost, Jesus' death was due to Israel's refusal of conversion. But the events between His death and Peter's sermon (resurrection, ascension, Pentecost) show God's turning in pity and mercy. Thus Peter appeals for repentance. **As in the Jonah story, in God's mercy a new Nineveh was created through a popular conversion, so in Jerusalem a new Israel is created through the conversion of the three thousand.** It is that new people, the new community of faith, that becomes the evidence and vehicle of salvation in Christ for Judea, Samaria, and the nations. The old Jerusalem which refused Jesus' strategy of overthrowing itself in conversion was overthrown later in the Zealots' fight with Rome in 70 A.D.

The future belongs to the converted who respond to God's mercy in the prophetic word and ultimately in His Messiah who is seated at the right hand of God "till I make Thy enemies a stool for Thy feet" (Acts 2:34f). **From Abraham to Peter, as typified by Jonah and fulfilled by Jesus, conversion is seen to be essentially eschatological.** It means a moving into and a participation in "the last days."

But it is not enough just to turn from the past to any future; rather it is from the past judged by God to that future offered by God in and through the Messiah. This Messiah Jesus, interpreted throughout all of the New Testament as the **Servant (Ebed, in Hebrew)-Messiah**, and even more as the **suffering** Servant-Messiah of the Servant-songs in the Isaiah writings, is "to establish justice in the earth" (42:4). It is the new and different posture of that Servant as fulfilled by Jesus that makes Him the "greater" (than Jonah or even John the Baptist) one, the beginning and the ending of the "last times."

The early Christians' awareness of the uniqueness of the servant-stance was what made them out to be a new people in the new times. They saw themselves to be "servants" in the wake of "your holy servant Jesus" (Acts 4:29f).³ The same Spirit that was upon the Servant in Isaiah 42:1 (and 61:1 where He is seen as proclaimer of Jubilee) was upon Jesus (Mark 1:9-12) and now upon them (Acts 2-3). Justice and peace are being fulfilled in the new community. Peter calls it the "times of refreshing . . . from the presence of the Lord [until He] send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the time for establishing all that God spoke by the holy prophets" (Acts 3:20f). Conversion is to that fulfillment and expectation. Paul will understand that same Spirit coming upon the Gentiles as the new people being created in the major cities of the northern Mediterranean. This is

the ultimate fulfilling in Jesus the Messiah of what was promised to Abraham in his blessing of all nations (cf. Galatians 3:14).

Henceforth, conversion is seen as a turning in total faith to the reigning and coming Servant-Messiah, Jesus. This new life is fulfilled in the Spirit by baptism and is the ultimate movement in history. Conversion is eschatological but also total in the sense of being for all peoples; the converted model a pattern intended for all—a new shape for human life and community based on Jesus.

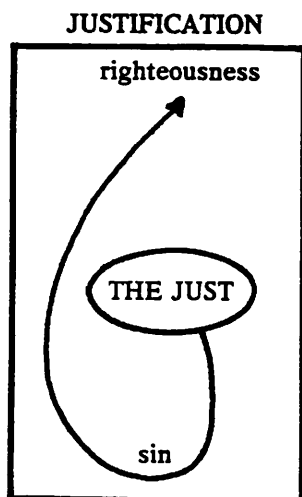
Personal Conversion in the Biblical Context

This universal people's movement of conversion is nevertheless seen to be personal, for persons are the *locus* of the turning. Those who in Christ are integrated into His Servant-community can say, "The old has passed away; the new has come." The New Testament recognizes that personal context; indeed, it is a part of the uniqueness of that picture that so much recognition is given to individual persons as such (Cf., e.g., Rom. 16). Yet little accent is put upon the description of the subjective—spiritual and psychological, affective and emotional—aspects as Western peoples are wont to do. Western culture is preoccupied with the psychological and affective. Manipulation and control of these realities has become a multibillion dollar science and industry. It is studied in order to give market dynamic to an economy of abundance.

The personal character and context of conversion is underlined in John's gospel: "born again" to Nicodemus, "drink the water I shall give" to the Samaritan woman, "eat my flesh" to the crowds filled with bread; "not walk in darkness but have the light of life" to the crowd on the last day of the feast, "enter by me—the door."

This same diversity in personal conversion contexts is evident in Paul's ministry as reported, for example, in Acts 16. There was Lydia, whose heart "the Lord opened." Then there was the slave girl with a spirit of divination which Paul charged "in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." In contrast to both, there is the jailer "about to kill himself. . . Trembling with fear, he fell down before Paul and Silas. . . He washed their wounds and was baptized at once." And finally, closely related and yet much different, there are the "households" of both Lydia and the jailer. But more important Paul uses great variety in language in his epistles. Here the appeal, teaching, conceptual explanations and interpretations will be somewhat different from his missionary message and call to repentance in the Book of Acts. The latter will almost always have the thrust seen in the Jonah-Jesus type while his epistles will speak of the **real experiential** diversity of the peoples who have turned to Christ from their personal (spiritual, social, ethical, religious, political) contexts outside of Christ. An examination of that language only emphasizes the fact that the existential and experiential reality of conversion seen as justification is one of many Pauline descriptions.

Context of Conversion	From	To	Through Jesus
Justification	Sin	Righteousness	the Just
Reconciliation	Enemy	Friend	Mediator
Resurrection	Death	Life	Resurrection-Life
Regeneration	Corruption	Incorruption	Life-Spirit
Salvation	Distress	Deliverance	Saviour
Salvation	Lost	Found	Saviour
Communion	Outside	Access	Head
Election	Nations	Kingdom	Messiah
Forgiveness	Debt	Cancelled	Sufferer of Loss
Recapitulation	Old Creation	New Creation	Lord
Hope	Despair	Assurance	Hope
Redemption	Slavery	Freedom	Redeemer
Adoption	Foreigner	Son	Heir
Victory	Hell-Satan	Heaven-God	Conqueror
Grace	Guilt	Pardon	Grace
Healing	Sickness	Health	Healer-Doctor
Deliverance (exorcism)	Possession	Self-possession	More Powerful One
Sanctification	Sin-profane	Holiness	Holy One



Each one of these lines is a precise, personally experienced context (sometimes collectively, as with Jews in general as typified by Paul). The personal conflict between sin and righteousness is resolved by Christ the Just, and that conversion is known as justification. It is Christ through justification who frees Paul from his sin.

The different aspect of the Word of Christ that becomes effectively functional within each "box" is variable. Here it is cross, there it is the resurrection; elsewhere it is both together. It may be His obedience, or in another place His "in the flesh"-ness, or His reign, or His coming, or His anointing by the Spirit. Each aspect obviously is a part of the whole; yet the Word comes into specific contexts in specific ways so that Christ is apprehended through the filters or grids of those who have turned to Him.

It is of course much easier to see if we look through biblical language and words rather than contemporary missions and understandings of conversion. The writers of *The Lonely Crowd*⁴ make the enlightening observation

that "tradition-directed" societies tend to express alienation in terms of shame; "inner-directed" societies with increasing accent on individuation tend to express relational alienation in terms of guilt; and "other-directed" modern mass societies tend to express such alienation in terms of anxiety. This can be a fruitful understanding for those involved in the Christ-given mission of the Servant-Community.

For example, F. B. Welbourn⁵ points out that the missionary brought to Africa the gospel of justification and grace whereas the societies to which that message was taken were not guilt-oriented. He asks what it would mean to preach the gospel to a shame-oriented people? Or again, Jacques Ellul⁶ demonstrates remarkably how Western (especially French) philosophy and thought have literally come to an impasse in anxiety-creating despair and hopelessness. This is not seen as a theological concept or category, but an actual, existential state of humanity. Neither of these illustrations—the one from a context of pre-Christian religion and the other from Western secular thought—begin with the need for justification. Conversion is hardly functional in the context of that "box."

Reading Riesman, Welbourn, and Ellul together could easily suggest that Western Christian missions to Africa, living out the anxiety of a mass-industrial society, tried to convert a shame-oriented people in pre-modern contexts, through a gospel appropriate to an individuated guilt-oriented society. Modern Western society needed freedom from guilt and this shaped Western Protestant understandings of Paul. But this was not necessarily where the crunch came for the Africans; in fact Western mission structures tended oftentimes to increase shame as understood by Africans. Thus, we can understand partially how the separatist, independent, spiritual congregations in Africa—without excluding Christians in mission-created congregations—have "heard" a different

gospel than that being preached, have been "converted" in terms of a different mental-spiritual-social "box" and have sorted out biblical emphases other than those which were mission taught.⁷

Personal Conversion in Contemporary Western Context

Just as there has been in the West a dominant theology of justification by faith, so there have justifiably been other theologies for other contexts. Could we even suggest that the Lord-disciple theology, in contrast to Luther's, that functioned within some of the sixteenth century left-wing reformation movements, was also contextually defined by the strong hierarchical ordering of society?⁸ In this vision the direct relation to the new Lord practically eliminated the socio-political, hierarchical structures yet

functioned creatively in new holistic (social, political, religious, economic) communities that threatened the sacralism of the time. Given the biblical view, the crucial question about conversion is not the personal (or collective) contexts that give rise to modes of conversion in types of theologies, but the type of human community a particular theology of conversion creates.

Today we recognize the legitimacy—and even necessity because of the nature of incarnation—of liberation theology, Black theology, theologies of contestation. Theologies of hope, of humanization, of self-fulfillment, etc., all attempt to speak to experiential and existential realities. Following the New Testament, we can in fact make a list of "boxes" which define contemporary contexts of conversion.

Context of Experience	From	To	Through Jesus
Acceptance	Rejection	Acceptance	Love
Direction	to err about	to aim at	Call
Festival	Boredom	Joy	Feast-giver
Meaning	the absurd	the reasonable	Word
Liberation	Oppression	Liberation	Liberator
Becoming	Nobody	Somebody	Invitation
Fellowship	Solitude	Community	Presence
Creation	Chaos	Order	Creator
Breakthrough	Blocked	Open	Future (Omega)
Order	Confusion	Peace	Structure
Dialogue	I-it	I-you	You
Conversation	Monologue	Dialogue	Other
Decision	Indecision	Choice	Unique
Fulfillment	Nihilism	Becoming	Being
Solidarity	Exploited	Defended	Leader
Humanization	Inhuman	Human	Human
Growth	Infantilism	Maturity	adult
<i>Concientizacion</i>	Powerlessness	Action	Sustainer
	Fatalism	Hope	

Conversion and Syncretism

It must be noticed that when we shift to contemporary human contexts of conversion it is easier, in contrast to biblical language, to observe how the gospel can be turned into religion similar to the first century rivals of Christianity. Using these modern "boxes" we can see how easy it is to "bring Jesus into my box" to make Him "mine," to "use Him" for my purposes. Thus conversion can become a thing that happens strictly within the self, a personal experience with no particular relationship to God's purposes "for the establishment of all things,"—the Kingdom come and coming. What we have not always seen is how this is possible also with the use of the biblical categories. When justification (or any of the other boxes, biblical or modern) is seen to be the goal of the gospel and the intent of conversion (e.g., turning to justification), the apostate character of syncretism becomes apparent (cf. the "box" on page 4). Happily, it was the Lutheran theologian Bonhoeffer who best helped the past genera-

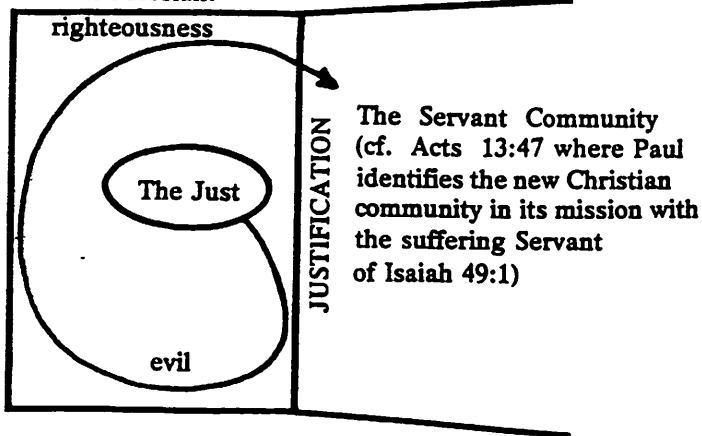
tion to see this with his classic description: "justification of sin rather than that of the sinner."⁹

Not all "justification" is Christ-centered, if we review it in the community of the Spirit of the suffering Servant who as Lord fulfills history with "the almighty meekness of the Lamb."¹⁰ Nor is all election Christ-centered, in the Servant (Ebed) sense. Nor is all redemption, or healing, or hope. And in the modern context we can say that all self-fulfillment is not Christ-centered, in the Ebed sense of the word,¹¹ even if the word "Christ" is used. But neither is all solidarity, nor liberation, nor blackness, nor openness.

The Axis of Conversion: The Servant-community of the Servant-Messiah.

Each of the contexts or boxes are potential syncretistic religious realities unless Christ is seen as the one who translates persons out of those specific personal (or collective) boxes into new community where justification,

redemption, election, healing, hope, self-fulfillment, solidarity, liberation, blackness, openness become functional in a new community defined by Jesus the suffering Servant-Messiah.¹²



Of all these contexts it must be said, as Paul wrote of the expressions of the Spirit in the church at Corinth: "There are varieties of working, but it is the same God who inspires them all in every one. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good" (I Cor. 12:6f) "... so that the church may be edified" (I Cor. 14:3,4,5,12,26).

Conversion means in terms of understanding God, a turn from the many gods, or from no god, or from "belief in" a distant, unknown, or inactive god to "the living God." In an understanding of the religious, it means turning from myth to event and history (covenant, exodus, exile-return, Jesus-event, church in conflict with the powers. . . .) It includes turning from the periodic shift in sacred and profane (ritual, initiation, festival) to holistic sacred lifestyle (charism, forgiveness, service). In relation to time, it means turning from past to a new linear future; and from the "old age" to the (christological) "new age." In terms of spiritual power, it means turning from its use for primarily material orientation (fertility, success, prosperity) to primary ethical preoccupation on the one hand; it means turning from prayer as manipulation of power to prayer as discernment for decision and release of redemptive creativity. To be human means turning from instrumentalism (i.e., people are to be used) to personhood (i.e., unique value of person in creation, redemption, gifts, development) and a turning from balance of powers, and equilibrium in roles, to mutuality (forgiveness, gifts, service, subordination). Conversion in specific regard to community, means turning from ethnicity, tribalism to open covenant based on Jesus' lordship (within the church) and from geographic and temporal parochialism (nationalisms) to the universal (present and coming) Kingdom.

All this, it seems to me, is clear in Jesus' fulfillment of the Jonah type. Yet more basic than all this is a foundational spiritual turning. This change is of the very essence of conversion, effected according to the biblical witness by God, the Holy Spirit. And it is at this level of

ethos that it seems to me that all of the other aspects of "turning" have to be ultimately discerned and judged. Reality divides into either the "Promethean" or "Ebed-ist" mentality. Roger Bastide¹³ suggests that all "development" today in the third world or anywhere requires a "promethean"¹⁴ mentality. This signifies man's perpetual state of dissatisfaction in spite of his increasing achievements in mastering and apparent control over his world and destiny and his compelling ambition to push further and further into the unknown, but presumably open, future. Today conversion is from such a "Promethean spirit." It is to a mentality that I have chosen to call "Ebed-ist" in order to follow Isaiah in accentuating the suffering-servant quality. The current concept of "servanthood" is distorted by modern notions of service growing out of commerce and industry, on the one hand, and patronizing notions of charity, on the other. Ebed defines that quality brought to us in Jesus the Messiah. The "Ebed-ist" spirit would be reflected in human renewal of covenant with God in His purpose for reconciling all of humanity in justice and peace through Jesus Christ. This is the basis for a covenant among men and women of solidarity in repentance and hope. It is expressed in Holy Spirit-endued service, in confident meekness, through the liberating proclamation and protest of His Word, healing for wholeness, suffering for righteousness, total participation in freely restored community, as experienced in a local congregation of people where Jesus is confessed as Lord. It is that difference which can give Christian mission today its either/or quality and restore radical meaning to conversion. Thus resurrection does not form the starting-point of revolution from which anything becomes possible, and for which the future is completely open, as Roger Garaudy says. But God's incarnation in Jesus, His active obedience for justice and peace, His suffering unto death, His resurrection, His reign through the Spirit, His coming again in fulfillment of all things, all announce, on the contrary, that human community is possible under God in Christ, in the shape of Jesus of Nazareth. Because of Him such community is at the very crux of history, as well as its end.

"The Kingdom of God is at hand; be converted, and believe the gospel," is yet the essential cry of that community.

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Footnotes

¹A.D. Nock, *Conversion: the Old and the New in Religion from Alexander the Great to Augustine of Hippo*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933.

²Idem, 218 ff.

³Henri Blocker, *Songs of the Servant: Isaiah's Good News* (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 1975), 21, underlines what is not often seen: "the need to recognize the pattern laid down in the songs for our own service. . . . Jesus Himself recalled the last Servant song when teaching the disciples the way to glory; and Peter quoted from it with the comment that 'you should follow in his steps' (Mark 10:41-45; I Peter 2:21)." (italics added)

⁴David Riesman, Nathan Glazer and Reuel Denney, *The Lonely Crowd*, Yale University Press, 1967 (13th Printing), 9-26.

⁵F. B. Welfourn, "Some Problems of African Christianity: Guilt and Shame," in C. G. Baeta (ed.), *Christianity in Tropical Africa*, Oxford University Press, 1968, 131-38.

⁶Cf. Jacques Ellul, *Hope in Time of Abandonment*, Seabury Press, 1974, especially "Self-critical Interlude," 156-66.

⁷John V. Taylor, *The Growth of the Church in Bugunda*, SCM Press, 1958, 253, illustrates how this happened in the Ugandan context. But it is also true that any minister or teacher of the Word knows how many messages his hearers have "heard" that he or she has never "preached."

⁸I was impressed by and reported this aspect of the context of conversion in "Faith and Doubt in Menno Simons," an unpublished seminar paper submitted to Fr. John Dunne, Notre Dame University, 1967.

⁹Cf. D. Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, Macmillan, 1946, Chapter 1, for his discussion of "cheap grace" and "costly grace."

¹⁰Norman Grubb used the happy and significant phrase "Almighty Meekness" as title for chapter 7 in *As Touching the Invisible*, Lutterworth Press, 1966, 34-41.

¹¹In fact it is probably the myth of self-fulfillment which has defined most totally the religious context of conversion in the contemporary

West. See especially Jeremy Zwelling, "Religion in the Department of Religion," in Myron B. Bloy (ed.), *Functions of Faith in Academic Life (Religious Education, 49:3-S, May-June 1974) S94-S137*. John Dunne has effectively pointed this out in his writings where "self-fulfillment" is seen to be the contemporary Western myth, as definition of what life is, given the fact of death.

¹²This "religionizing" through emphasis, as compared to the major biblical thrust, is illustrated within the contemporary scene by Kenneth Kantzer's description of evangelical self-understanding: "[Evangelicals are] people who have received God's cure for the haunting and indelible guilt of sin and that corrosive emptiness of the heart for which Christ is alone the enduring solution. For this reason they have a message to share." (David F. Wells and John D. Woodbridge (eds.), *The Evangelicals: What they believe, who they are, where they are changing*, Abingdon Press, 1975, 41.) Such a tack can be one of the very real entries into Kingdom reality (which I have myself used in preaching, e.g., in *Who Will Answer?*, Herald Press, 1969) as conversion structure; but to define the gospel impact by a single emphasis or reduction is precisely the individualizing and existential spiritualism which ignores in its emphasis the fundamental biblical thrust. To the materialists of His time Jesus warned about "gaining the whole world and losing one's soul." Here the word might well be a warning about "gaining one's soul, and losing the Kingdom." For the biblical message has a different accent than that.

¹³Cf. Roger Bastide, "Messianism and social and economic development," in John Wallerstein (ed.), *Social Change: The Colonial Situation*, John Wiley and Sons, 1966, 467-77. Bastide here expands an idea put forward by Georges Gurvitch.

¹⁴Prometheus, we recall, was the god of fire in Greek mythology who stole the fire from heaven in order to animate human life; but he was punished by Zeus by being nailed to a mountain where a vulture kept on eating out his liver.

APPROACHES TO DIALOGUE

☆ **by a Methodist missionary to the Philippines**

William M. Pickard, Jr.

☆ **by an Evangelical Anglican Bible teacher**

John R. Stott

☆ **by a Baptist missionary to Jews in Israel**

Robert L. Lindsey

excellent

Joseph B. Bustillos
MT 533: Theology of Religious Encounter
February 1, 1985

Essay Review: Biblical Perspective for Dialogue, by William M. Pickard, Jr.

The gist of Dr. Pickard's essay is that before we can establish a "consensus among Christians" about the procedure to take in terms of Dialogue¹, we need to be aware of the danger of overlooking a fundamental step in establishing any Christian Theology: proper exegesis of our texts. He illustrates his point using the Prologue to John's gospel, Acts 14:17 and Romans 1:19-20 as examples of this problem. This is especially enlightening with regards to the fact that the position he skillfully criticizes seems to be the one taken by our class, namely the idea of General Revelation. ✓

On page 42 of his essay he writes about those that fall under an understanding of Christianity in terms of "Experience" or the "Existential Encounter with God" while others speak in terms of the "Propositional Truth in Christianity." He paints the picture of these two camps as being the ground upon which the Dialogue debate has been stalled. He goes on to write,

The writer does not propose in this article to elucidate these two theological perspectives. Rather, what he wishes to do is to place in question certain current forms of methodology which seem to him rather too close to a revised version of the old "proof-text" method of dealing with the scripture." (p. 43)

He seem to feel that there is often a form of mistaken identity between ones "theological position" and the proposed "Biblical view." The problem centers around his view that, "Our basic theological perspective may determine the content of our 'Biblical view' and not vice versa." (p. 43)

Having written that, he shows his bias towards a more minimalistic, Bible-first, perhaps Barthian perspective.² The "Logos" is not the "spermatikos logos" of greek philosophy, the "universal reason which infuses and governs the world of matter," but is is the Divine Expression of YHWH, fully pronounced in the Person of Christ. The witness that God has left of himself to all peoples in not in some universal religious truth but the final testimony of Christ on the Cross (referring to Acts 14). And the excuselessness of mankind in Romans is not because of some partial or general revelation of the Divine behind the Visible Creation, but because by God's unknownness (perhaps "Otherness"³) man should have known (realized) that his paganism was not an act of worship of the Divine but utter blasphemy.

He concludes by writing that his point is not to "make an exhaustive study or to argue for one exegesis as against another" but to show the viable alternatives that have been more or less taken for granted to be otherwise. He writes that we need to

recognize the strong tendency for our theological perspective to determine our "Biblical" view:

A clear "biblical view" may not always be implicit in the Bible passages themselves. Such recognition could drive those of us within the Christian tradition to a more serious "centering down" upon the essential gospel we proclaim--- Jesus Christ and him crucified--- and to distinguish this gospel more clearly from the ever changing cultural and religious milieu of the day--- whether of our day or of a day past and gone (demythologizing). (p. 55)

Much like Newbigin he seems to want to see a Christianity stripped of its self-determined baggage and open to the revelation and singularity of the Person of Christ. Pickard's own exegesis may stretch the text a bit but the point is well taken. I wonder if I'm becoming Barthian?

*In part, it is okay
but keep your guard up!*

FOOTNOTES

¹ Is there a consensus among Christians about anything?

² I say "perhaps"--- Neanderthals can never be sure.

³ Check that--- "Otherness" sounds too philosophical.

Biblical Perspective for Dialogue

By William M. Pickard, Jr.

The Question of Methodology

One of the most significant developments in present day missionary theology is the emphasis upon dialogue with men of other faiths or of no faith. We can only greet this emphasis with great joy and with thankfulness that the days of diatribe and polemic are ended. It is recognized by all, however, that the desire for dialogue is only the beginning. How to proceed is crucial, and the subject is getting much attention today. But as of now no consensus among Christians has been reached as to procedure. The committee planning for the Fourth Assembly of the World Council of Churches held recently in Uppsala, Sweden, decided not to include the subject of dialogue in the agenda because of a "conviction that as yet we are insufficiently prepared to tackle it." But such a crucial question could not be avoided. The draft for Section II included a statement on dialogue, and the subject featured prominently in the discussions. The final report, "Renewal In Mission," affirmed that dialogue is central in modern mission strategy. The question that confronts us today is to define precisely what dialogue involves and to delineate the how of such encounter.

At the heart of the issue is the question of the relationship of the Christian gospel to the religions, philosophies, and cultures of mankind. For many years two basically different theological perspectives have vied for recognition as *the* Christian position. One perspective interprets the gospel as the supreme revelation of that which has been dimly and inadequately revealed by God and perceived by man in many ways and in many places. This position sees revelation as essentially propositional and therefore closely allied with the philosophical and religious quest of man for truth. The other position interprets the gospel existentially and sees the revelation in Christ not in terms of propositions or "truths," but in terms of encounter with the living God. It affirms that the heart of the gospel is expressed in the scandal of the cross and believes that the cross pronounces a "no" upon all the efforts of man to reach God, whether these efforts be expressions of historic Christianity or of other faiths. This *theologia crucis* reverses and negates man's insights and his strivings because it demands repentance and

1. *Study Encounter*, Vol. III, No. 2, 1967, p. 51.

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Is there any consensus
in any 1582?

surrender ("He that loseth his life shall find it") and not insight or achievement.

The writer does not propose in this article to elucidate these two theological perspectives. Rather, what he wishes to do is to place in question certain current forms of methodology which seem to him rather too close to a revised version of the old "proof-text" method of dealing with the scripture. In much of the discussion of the method of approach and in the "prolegomena" for a theology of mission, there appears to be the assumption that if one establishes a "biblical view" of the "heathen" or of the "gentiles" or of "man and the world," or of "God and the world," et cetera, then he has established a clear and indisputable basis for the Christian mission in an age of dialogue. The writer does not wish to deny that broadly speaking certain "biblical views" can be discerned. But he does wish to point out the danger that one's own theological position will be "established" as "biblical view." Even more questionable is the use of scripture with the tacit assumption that it could only mean what the writer or speaker interprets it to mean. For instance, the quotation of Acts 14:17 where Paul says that God "left not himself without witness" as though this obviously affirms a general knowledge of God among all men is no longer valid. For competent biblical scholars precisely question this interpretation and a writer would be wise to proceed with caution at this point. Such knowledge may be a fact. It is not our purpose here to argue the point. But whether true or not we do not "prove" it or establish it by quoting this passage. The passage may have a quite different meaning. Our basic theological perspective may determine the content of our "biblical view" and not vice versa.

The Johannine Prologue

For example, let us look at the "biblical view" of "God, man and the world" expressed in the Prologue to John's gosepl. Some scholars approaching this prologue from the standpoint of the Greek *Logos* philosophy find that the "biblical view" of the God-man relationship expressed here is identical with the Greek *logos spermatikos* doctrine. An outstanding proponent of this view is Alan Coates Bouquet, distinguished student of world religions, and lecturer at Cambridge University. His exhaustive work titled *The Christian Faith and Non-Christian Religions*² sets forth the history of the *Logos* concept in Greek thought from Heracleitus (c. 500 B. C.) down to the time of Christ, showing its many manifestations as the principle of rational orderliness in the divine cosmos.³ The *Logos* is the universal reason which infuses and governs the world of matter. Though in the beginning the term *Logos* had the two-fold use of speech and reason, the former usage gradually

2. New York: Harper and Bros., 1958. Also see his article "Revelation and the Divine Logos" in *The Theology of the Christian Mission*, ed. Gerald H. Anderson, pp. 183-98.

3. *The Christian Faith and Non-Christian Religions*, pp. 137ff.

dropped out and the latter one became predominant. Bouquet shows that as time passed, many of the Greeks came to view the universal *Logos* as in some sense personal, at times identifying it with one of the gods.⁴ Thus the development of the *Logos* concept in Greek philosophy, Bouquet maintains, paved the way for the adoption of the term by Christian theologians of the first and second centuries in their effort to give expression to their Christological and trinitarian faith. He maintains that the basically Greek concept of the *Logos* was a common property of all educated men in the first century and that this concept colored the writings of the time. He says, "The Logos-doctrine in fact, as a piece of secular thought, like that of evolution or of relativity in our own day, is present in the minds of many writers at the beginning of the first century A. D."⁵

Bouquet points to the use of the term *Logos* in the Septuagint, and maintains that it is understood primarily in the Greek sense.⁶ He recognizes that it is used to translate the Hebrew word which means God's speaking and that this Hebrew usage is not philosophical but theological. However, he insists that the Septuagint usage is basically the same as the Greek philosophical understanding of the term.⁷ He says, "Once we divest ourselves of prejudice, we can have no sort of doubt in our minds that the Philonic approach is to be seen in the Joahnine literature of the New Testament, if not in other places."⁸ Thus, Bouquet maintains that the Prologue to the Fourth Gospel uses the word *Logos* in its Greek sense, and that the writer intended it so to be understood.⁹ He points out that the "term *Logos* is introduced without any preamble, and the implication is that the readers will understand the allusion at once."¹⁰ Therefore, he says that since the word *Logos* refers to "being" rather than "speech," "it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that whoever wrote the Prologue meant its readers to identify Jesus with the *Logos* in the sense in which the word was used in Hellenistic Gentile philosophical theology."¹¹

Bouquet argues that for the author of the Fourth Gosepl to use the term *Logos* other than with its commonly understood Greek philosophical meaning would be like introducing the scientific term relativity into a theological work, but using it in a quite different way to that in which it is used by Einstein.¹² He says of the Johannine writer: "Whoever he may have been,

4. *Ibid.*, p. 142.

5. *Ibid.*

6. *Ibid.*, pp. 144ff.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 145.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 146.

9. *Ibid.*, pp 148-49.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 150.

11. *Ibid.*

12. It might be noted in passing, however, that the word *relativity* does appear often in theological writing without any connection whatever with the scientific theory. It is quite possible for a word to be in common use and at the same time have more than one distinct meaning.

when he wrote 'Logos' he meant 'Logos,' and he meant it to be taken in the sense in which a contemporary Stoic writer would have taken it." He then proceeds to show how the early church, beginning principally with Justin Martyr and followed by Clement of Alexandria, Origen and others, understood John's Gospel in this way and so developed the *Logos* doctrine. The acceptance of this *Logos* view also made possible, Bouquet maintains, the canonization of the Fourth Gospel. It was the fact that Christians of the first and second centuries came generally to accept the view of Justin Martyr to the effect that persons such as Socrates and Plato, who lived "according to the *Logos*" were "Christians before Christ," that made the Fourth Gospel acceptable.¹⁴

Bouquet insists, therefore, that the acceptance of the Greek *Logos* concept into the body of Christian doctrine is not only an historical fact but also is theologically sound. His primary concern is to establish a connection between the Greek philosophical *Logos* concept and the specific revelation of God in the *Logos* of John's Gospel. This broadens the concept of Christian revelation, allowing the *Logos* of John's Gospel to work as a universal reason in all men. All men by creation are endowed with a "seed" (*sperma*) of the *Logos*. This *logos spermatikos* is the "true light that enlightens every man" (John 1:9). On this basis all men have a basic continuity with the divine reason, and thus an autonomous principle of knowledge or a *logos spermatikos*.

Furthermore, the divine *Logos*, because of the basic continuity of God and man, is at work in all cultures and all religions. Bouquet says that "the *Logos* while certainly being *ἀπὸ τοῦ Θεοῦ* does not confine His operation to the historical Jesus, but functions also, though in a lesser degree, in *all* religious leaders, whose work is thus related to that of Jesus." On this basis Bouquet says that the expression "Whatever men have said or done well, belongs to us Christians," may be accepted as true. He points out that though it is "A startlingly liberal statement, yet it is one which the Christian Church has never expressly repudiated in her Councils."¹⁵ Bouquet further affirms that:

the statement about *Christians before Christ* is capable of being extended so as to embrace most of the sages of Asia, and to include, for instance, Sankara, Lao-tzu and Mo-ti and even perhaps, paradoxical as it may seem, the Jew, Karl Marx, as among those who have lived and talked 'according to *Logos*.'¹⁷

The *logos spermatikos* doctrine, then, takes its starting point from Greek philosophy and posits a philosophical principle, an impersonal

13. *The Christian Faith and Non-Christian Religions*, p. 157.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 138.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 155.

16. *Ibid.*

17. *Ibid.*, p. 138.

metaphysical reality which it views as the divine reason. This universal *Logos* or principle of divine reason becomes personal and is manifest supremely in Jesus Christ, but also is to be found in other men and in other religions. Thus, abstract principle, or impersonal metaphysical reality, is made to be prior to personal historical existence in the sense that it is the universal *Logos* which is incarnate in Jesus Christ (as well as in other men such as Sankara, Lao-tzu, and Mo-ti). This represents one clear biblical perspective and one starting point or prolegomenon for the development of a missionary theology. For Bouquet, this is the "biblical view" of God, man, and the world as expressed in John's Prologue.

But let us now observe that a vastly different "biblical view" of God, man, and the world may be found in the same passage. We turn to Rudolf Bultmann. Bultmann emphasizes the fact that in the Old Testament God's Word and His act are one, as for instance in Genesis I where we read, "And God said . . . and there was . . ." He stresses also the fact that the same is true of Jesus: "His words are utterance about himself (II, p. 19). What is said of his word is also said of himself: his words are 'life,' they are 'truth' (6:63; 17:17); but so is he himself—'I am the way, and the truth, and the life' " (14:6).¹⁸ Thus Bultmann says, "No wonder, then, that the evangelist can confer upon him for his pre-existent period the mythological title: *Word* (*Logos*)!"¹⁹ But *Logos* here, Bultmann insists, has nothing to do with the Greek philosophical concept. It is to be identified with the being of God himself—his Word and his Being are one—and is definitely Hebrew and not Greek: "The *Logos* was with God and the *Logos* was God." The supposition that the phrase, the "true light that enlightens every man" (1:9) refers to a kind of *logos spermatikos* ignores the fact that the "light" spoken of is precisely Jesus Christ, both as pre-existent Son and as Incarnate Lord.

Bultmann suggests that though *Logos* in the Prologue is a proper and not a common noun, nevertheless "it is . . . certain that the everyday meaning ('Word') behind the name '*Logos*' is present in the evangelist's mind. For he is hardly likely to have begun his Gospel with the sentence 'In the beginning was the *Logos*,' without thinking of 'In the beginning' at Gen. 1:1 and of the recurrent phrase 'God said' in the creation story of Gen. 1."²⁰ It is to be recognized that "The title '*Logos*' is not derived from the Old Testament, for in it—as also in Judaism—we hear of the 'word of God' but never find the unmodified expression, 'the Word.'"²¹ But likewise "the title '*Logos*' [is not] derived from the Greek philosophical tradition in general or from Stoicism in particular and transmitted to the evangelist by Philo of Alexan-

18. *Theology of the New Testament* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1955), II, p. 63. (One should read in this connection Bultmann's entire discussion pp. 59-69.)

19. *Ibid.*, p. 64.

20. *Ibid.*

21. *Ibid.*

dria, for the philosophical idea of *logos* as the rational orderliness of the divine cosmos is quite foreign to John."²² Bultmann points out that "In the literature of the Old Testament and of Judaism there is a figure 'Wisdom,' which is parallel to John's 'Word.' Both figures, 'Word' and 'Wisdom,' appear side by side in Philo."²³ The concept here "has not merely cosmological but also soteriological functions."²⁴ Therefore, it is a completely different concept from the one found in Greek philosophy where *Logos* is divine reason and cosmic orderliness.

Furthermore, the supposition that the Gospel of John was written by someone with a Greek background primarily for a Greek audience—one of the basic assumptions of Bouquet's position—has been placed in serious question by the Dead Sea Scrolls. Though there are still many differences of opinion regarding the scrolls, it seems evident that they do indicate a revision in our interpretation of the Johannine literature. Millar Burrows states: "What may be said without any exaggeration is that the Gospel and the epistles of John and the Dead Sea Scrolls reflect the same general background of sectarian Judaism."²⁵ His conclusion is that, "The scrolls thus show—and this has not always been recognized—that we do not have to look outside of Palestinian Judaism for the soil in which the Johannine theology grew."²⁶ Brownlee points out that whereas the Gospel of John "has been regarded as more Hellenistic than Jewish,"²⁷ its basic flavor is strongly Semitic. This has given rise to theories that it was originally composed in Aramaic. Also he notes that "though much of the terminology is the same as in Greek literature, the meanings of the words and phrases are often quite different."²⁸ The Dead Sea Scrolls have come, he says, as "a flash of light, illuminating almost everything."²⁹ "To our amazement," he concludes, "this [Johannine] literature is not only Jewish, but Palestinian. Consequently the ultimate sources for the Fourth Gospel must be Palestinian in origin."³⁰

All of this means that Bultmann may be right. At least his conclusion that the Johannine use of the term *Logos* roots in a "tradition of cosmological mythology which also exercised an influence upon Judaism, especially upon Philo,"³¹ cannot be dismissed as lightly as some are prone to do. Exactly the same kind of thing seems to have influenced the Qumrân community. Also Bultmann's claim that John is not combining Greek philosophy with

22. *Ibid.*

23. *Ibid.*

24. *Ibid.*

25. *The Dead Sea Scrolls* (New York: The Viking Press, 1956), p. 339.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 340.

27. William H. Brownlee, *The Meaning of the Qumrân Scrolls for the Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), p. 122.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 123.

29. *Ibid.*

30. *Ibid.*

31. *Theology of the New Testament*, II, 64.

Hebrew thought about God can no longer be ignored. It would appear that the author of the Prologue was speaking about the "being" of God, God's creating Word—"And God said"—and that this creating Word is identified with the preexistent Christ.

Richard H. Drummond in a recent article titled "Prolegomena for a Theology of the Christian World Mission" notes Bultmann's position, but summarily dismisses it: "Bultmann's position, however, can hardly be maintained, as the author of John expressly establishes a relation between God and the world by his description of the role of the divine Logos in creation, 'all things were made through him, and without him, was not anything made that was made.'"³² But the thing Bultmann precisely questions is whether John does "expressly establish" such relationship to the Greek *Logos* idea. Bultmann does not, as Drummond charges, "contend that the *logos* of the prologue of John is not used to explain the relation of the transcendent God to the world."³³ Bultmann affirms quite clearly that the *Logos* of John is the pre-existent Son through whom "all things were made" and surely this relates the "transcendent God to the world." But what Bultmann does deny is that this *Logos* is the same as the Greek philosophical *Logos* concept.

Emil Brunner agrees with the exegesis of Bultmann. He points out that "the Logos of whom the Bible speaks is not speech about something, but the Speaker himself."³⁴ Further, he states, "And this Logos [of John's Gospel.] is not the one of which Greek idealism or, indeed, idealism in general, speaks—the ahistorical timeless logos of speculative thinking—but the Logos that became history in Jesus Christ, the Logos in which the Word of God, God's very self, the Lord, calls to us and encounters us."³⁵

Hendrik Kraemer likewise gives major attention to the Logos Doctrine and comes to the same conclusion as Bultmann. He says, "To summarize the meaning of the passage [in John's Prologue]: the Logos from eternity with God and Himself God, is the fact Jesus Christ, the man of Nazareth. This is what the Prologue of John teaches plainly."³⁶ The Logos in John's Prologue, then, Kraemer says, "is peculiarly unfit to have put upon it the constructions which have been used in relation to it, since Justin Martyr, regarding our problem."³⁷ He says, therefore, that: "the age-long recourse to this classical passage as the scriptural basis or justification to interpret all non-Christian religion and philosophy as *praeparatio evangelica* . . .

32. *Encounter*, Vol. 28, Spring, 1967, p. 120.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 119.

34. *Truth as Encounter*, trans. David Cairns (2nd ed., Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1964), p. 26. Originally published in 1943.

35. *Ibid.*, pp. 34-35.

36. *Religion and the Christian Faith* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1956), p. 275.

37. *Ibid.*, p. 276.

and to take their so-called "best and highest elements" as indications that they are well on the road to Christ, needs drastic revision."³⁸

Acts and Romans

What, then, is the "biblical view" of God, man, and world? The problem may be made even sharper by looking at two other passages which are frequently quoted by missiologists. They are: Acts 14:16-17 and Romans 1:18-22.³⁹ These passages are often viewed as expressions of what is called "general revelation." The statement, "he did not leave himself without witness," seems to say clearly that God has revealed himself, at least partially, among all peoples. This interpretation has been widely accepted in missionary theology as a biblical basis for recognizing truth or knowledge of God in the various religions of mankind. J. Rawson Lumby in *The Cambridge Bible* says of Acts 14:16-17: "This is the same argument the apostle employs (17:27) to the more philosophic multitude whom he addressed on Mars' hill. God's natural teaching is meant to speak alike to all men."⁴⁰ F. J. Foakes-Jackson says of Acts 14:17, "This appeal to natural religion is constantly made by the first preachers of the gospel; and vers. 15-17 are in themselves an epitome of the earliest method of approach to heathen audiences."⁴¹ G. H. Macgregor takes the same position. He compares Acts 14:17 with Romans 1:20 and concludes that this kind of appeal is "admirably adapted to a Hellenistic pagan audience."⁴²

Regarding Romans 1:19-23, William Sanday and Arthur Headlam point out that, "The argument from the nature of the created world to the character of its author is as old as the Psalter, Job, and Isaiah: Pss. 19:1; 94:9; 143:5; 13:1, 5."⁴³ C. H. Dodd says of Romans 1:18-23: "There is no other passage where Paul so explicitly recognizes 'natural religion' as a fundamental trait of human nature. 'Whatever is to be known of God is plain to them.'"⁴⁴ K. E. Kirk says regarding Romans 1:18-23: "S. Paul's view seems to be that the knowledge of right and wrong is derived from the contemplation of God's *everlasting power and divinity*, which in their turn are *perceived through the things that are made*. This bases morality not on

38. *Ibid.*

39. A number of other passages could be selected, but these two are probably more frequently quoted.

40. *The Acts of the Apostles, The Cambridge Bible* (Cambridge: University Press, 1907), p. 179.

41. *The Acts of the Apostles, The Moffatt New Testament Commentary* (New York: Richard R. Smith, Inc., 1931), p. 127.

42. Exegesis, "The Acts of the Apostles," *The Interpreter's Bible* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1954), IX, 190.

43. *The Epistle to the Romans, International Critical Commentary* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1920), p. 43.

44. *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans, The Moffatt New Testament Commentary Series* (New York: Harper and Bros., 1932), p. 24.

direct intuition, but on inference from natural religion."⁴⁵ John Knox takes the same position: "Now [Paul] points out that the Gentiles have been given knowledge of God . . . This knowledge of God is of 'his invisible nature. . . his eternal power and deity,' and has been given through the created order of the natural world (cf., e. g. Ps. 19:1)."⁴⁶

These passages in Romans and Acts provide, then, according to this interpretation, a clear biblical basis for the view that God has revealed himself in a general way to all men. They imply an ontological point of contact within man to which general revelation may appeal. Dodd says of the Romans passage: "The impiety and wickedness of men is hindering the truth about the nature of God which is *native to the human mind* . . ."⁴⁷ (*Italics mine*). This position is asserted to be the "biblical view" of God, man and the world. In fact, it has been so generally accepted in some missionary circles that many would probably ask, "Why, what else could these passages mean?"

But the fact is there is the possibility of a quite different exegesis. And we would be wise to recognize this possibility rather than using the verses as though there could be no question about their meaning. According to Acts 14:17, what is the "witness" which God has left? It is that God "did good and gave you from heaven rains and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness." But note, there is no indication that the Gentiles actually saw this as witness of the God who is God. In fact, Paul is precisely declaring to them something which they did not know. They may have seen the rain and the good crops as evidence of some deity—but not as evidence of the God who is God. Paul explicitly declares this in his sermon on the unknown God at Athens (Act 17). Regarding Romans 1:18-23, the question may be raised as to *what* is known about God. Barth does this in his exegesis of the passage which he relates also to Acts 14:16-17 and Acts 17:22ff.⁴⁸ Likewise he deals with the matter in the *Church Dogmatics*.⁴⁹ Barth insists that Paul's preaching in Acts is a part of the Kerygma of the church and must not be seen as an isolated statement about the Gentiles. It is proclaimed from the perspective of what God has done in Christ: "We must bear in mind that the very words which are so often regarded as an opening or a summons to every possible kind of natural theology are in reality a constituent part of the apostolic *kerygma*, whatever contemporary philoso-

45. *The Epistle to the Romans, The Clarendon Bible* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1937), pp. 37-38.

46. *Interpreters' Bible*, Vol. IX, p. 398.

47. *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans, The Moffatt New Testament Commentary Series*, p. 24.

48. *The Epistle to the Romans*, trans., Edwyn C. Hoskyns from the 6th edition (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), pp. 42-48. Translated from *Der Römerbrief* (Zollikon-Zurich: Evangelischer Verlag, 1964), pp. 18-24.

49. *Church Dogmatics*, trans. G. T. Thomson, Harold Knight, G. W. Bromiley, et al. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1932), I/2, pp. 301-308. Translated from *Die Kirchliche Dogmatik* (Zollikon-Zurich: Evangelischer Verlag, 1936), I/2, 331-39.

phemes may be woven into them."⁵⁰ Thus Barth claims that it is through the revelation in Jesus Christ that the relationship is established and the possibilities opened whereby both Gentiles and Jews may now know that God—the God who is God, not a mere figment of their own minds—has not forsaken them, that he has not left himself without witness:

In the speeches of Acts the witness which is disclosed and awakens and accuses in this way, the witness which is promised to all men in and with the proclamation of Christ, is its knowledge of God as the Creator. "He did you good and gave you rain from heaven and fruitful seasons and filled your hearts with food and gladness" (Ac. 14:17). Yes, He!⁵¹

The "He" is only recognized as the real "He"—the God who is God—when he is seen to be who he is in the revelation in Christ. Only in this way is it recognized that it is *this* God who has so witnessed. Therefore, the statement in Acts is made about God as revealed in Christ, and is not a statement about some supposed general revelation among the heathen.

In *The Epistle to the Romans*, Barth likewise contends that Romans 1:19-20 should not be seen as affirming a natural knowledge of God, but rather exactly the opposite. The expression in verse 19, "What can be known about God" does not indicate that some *things* can be known about God. Rather, what verse 20 says can be known about God is precisely his unknowability—his invisible nature. The fact that his power and deity are eternal (not temporal and knowable), is manifest in the things that are seen. In other words, it should be clear (it "has been clearly perceived") that he is unknowable. Barth says, "We know that God is He whom we do not know, and that our ignorance is precisely the problem and the source of our knowledge."⁵² Our existential situation, Barth says, is quite clear: "And so the boundary which bars us in and which, nevertheless, points beyond itself, can 'since the creation of the world' be clearly seen 'through the things that are made' by God."⁵³ Therefore, "what is clearly seen to be indisputable reality is the invisibility of God, which is precisely and in strict agreement with the gospel of the resurrection—"His everlasting power and divinity."⁵⁴

In what sense, then, is man "without excuse" (Romans 1:20)? It is that "although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking and their senseless minds were darkened" (Romans 1:21). In other words, even though the "things that have been made" clearly reveal that God is actually unknowable, and should have been known as such (in this sense one should read, "although

50. *Ibid.*, p. 306 (K.D., 334).

51. *Ibid.*, p. 305 (K.D., 333).

52. *Epistle to the Romans*, p. 45.

53. *Ibid.*, pp. 46-47.

54. *Ibid.*

they knew God"), the heathen chose to know him as some deity that can be known—that is, they created their own gods and refused to "honor *Him* as God." Thus, they are accountable for their rebellion, for their refusal to recognize their own creaturehood, and for their failure to see that the invisible God is not the gods whom they have created and whom they worship, the gods which actually represent selfdeification and self-worship.

To some this will appear as a rather strained exegesis. However, if verses 19 and 20 are read as a unit and the entire passage is seen in the context of Paul's attack on idol worship and on the corruption apparent in man-made religion, the logic in the interpretation will become more apparent even if one does not agree with it. Knox points out that *γνωστός* does not necessarily mean "what can be known," but may mean, "what is known." Certainly there is one sense in which the passage is saying that what is known is God's unknowability (invisibility). As with the Athenians, Paul is declaring a God previously unknown to them.

Kraemer also deals quite thoroughly with the Acts and Romans passages.⁵⁵ Though he disagrees with Barth's exegesis at a number of points, he nevertheless holds that the Romans and Acts passages do not imply in any sense a natural theology. Concerning Acts 14:17, Kraemer rejects Barth's view that the verse refers to the condition to which the Lycaonians are brought by Paul's preaching.⁵⁷ But he points out that God's objective manifestation of himself ("for he did good and gave you from heaven rains and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness") in no way implies a subjective knowledge of God on the part of the Gentiles. Kraemer paraphrases Acts 14:15-17 as follows:

Your religious way of life is error, in which your God-forsakenness manifests itself, but nevertheless in this God-forsakenness God has not left you alone, because He goes on revealing Himself to you, whether you acknowledge it or not. Properly speaking, you are both God-forsaken and not God-forsaken.⁵⁸

This dialectical understanding of the god-man relationship asserts that from the pole of God's self-disclosure "general revelation" is always a possibility. But from the pole of man's receptivity the possibilities are only opened in Jesus Christ. What Acts is asserting is the true nature of God: God is continually revealing himself and has never "left himself without witness." "However," Kraemer says, "one cannot find in these words what is always read into them, that God is revealing Himself in their idolatrous religions. God's revelatory, witnessing activity, here recorded, is—to express

55. *Interpreter's Bible*, Vol. IX, p. 398.

56. *Religion and the Christian Faith*, pp. 281-315.

57. *Ibid.*, p. 309.

58. *Ibid.*, p. 282.

it by an arid word—objective, not subjective.”⁵⁹

Luther's interpretation of Romans 1:18-20 found in his *Lectures on Romans* follows the same line.⁶⁰ In his Heidelberg Disputation of 1518, theses nineteen and twenty have to do with the way in which one arrives at the knowledge of God, and relate to Roman 1, particularly verses 19 and 20. The theses read:

19. Non ille digne Theologus dicitur, qui invisibilia Dei per ea, quae facta sunt, intellecta conspiciunt. (That person does not deserve to be called a theologian who looks upon the invisible things of God as though they were clearly perceptible in those things which have been made.)

20. Sed qui visibilia et posteriora Dei per passiones et crucem conspecta intelligit. (He deserves to be called a theologian, however, who comprehends the visible and manifest things of God seen through sufferings and the cross.⁶¹)

In thesis nineteen Luther refutes that theology which purports to see the invisible things of God through the visible. The method of natural theology is to look at the visible things of the world of nature and to infer from them the invisible things of God. Actually such a person, Luther says, sees what he has already determined in his mind to see. The expression *intellecta conspiciunt* means, “the things which have been understood, he sees”—that is, he sees what he has already understood. He sees what he has predetermined (through understanding) to see. Understanding in this case is prior to seeing and determines what is seen.

In thesis twenty, Luther reverses the participle and the verb to read *conspecta intelligit* which, translated, is “the things which have been seen, he understands.” Here the implication is that seeing is prior to understanding. The true theologian does not pre-determine what he will see. Luther says that it is not by seeing the “invisible things of God as they are comprehended in the things which have been created” (which is to see what is not actually there but only imagined in the mind), but by seeing what God has actually made visible “through sufferings and the cross,” that the true theologian comes to the knowledge of God. Lennart Pinomaa points out that:

Luther does not reject in principle this way to knowledge of God. Obviously one ought to reach knowledge of God by means of God's works. But in reality this does not happen. Luther accepts fully the factual statements of Romans 1, the appraisal of the situation in which the heathen find themselves with natural revelation: “Claiming to be wise, they become fools” (Rom. 1:22). Beholding the works of creation did not lead

59. *Ibid.*

60. *Luther: Lectures on Romans*, Vol. XV of *The Library of Christian Classics*, trans. and ed. Wilhelm Pauck (London: Student Christian Movement Press, 1961), pp. 19-26; 50-54.

61. “Disputatio Heidelbergae Lobita, 1518,” *D. Martin Luthers Werke, Kritische Gesamtausgabe* (Weimar: Hermann Bohlan, 1883), I, 354. American edition: *Luther's Works, Career of the Reformer*, ed. Harold J. Grimm (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1957), XXXI, 40.

the heathen to knowledge of the invisible attributes of God. This way proved false. Any "theology of glory" (*theologia gloriae*) which insists on using this way is thereby passing judgment upon itself. A theology of glory cannot be true theology.⁶²

This, then, according to Luther, is the meaning of Romans 1:19-22. The true theologian does not find knowledge of God in nature, but in the cross. One encounters God in exactly the opposite way to that which he, in his human wisdom, expects. A person thinks that he discovers God's glory, his majesty, his goodness, and his power in nature—the *theologia gloriae*. But what he actually does is to project his own imagination through superlative concepts of virtue, wisdom, and power. The true theologian proceeds in exactly the opposite way. Knowledge of God is derived where God actually reveals himself—in the cross. Through seeing what God has actually revealed of himself in the cross, the true theologian understands God (*conspecta intelligit*).

What God reveals according to thesis 20, is the *posteriora Dei*. The term indicates that God is seen from behind. What one sees is the "back side of God." Luther is alluding to Exodus 33:11-23 where God passed before Moses and allowed Moses to see only his "back side." Luther is saying that it is not the true theologian, but the false theologian who sees (by looking at the "things which have been made") what he imagines. The false theologian sees what he has predetermined in his understanding to see (*intellecta conspicit*). Of course, it is possible to apply this same line of reasoning to Luther's exegesis and to claim that he sees in the "sufferings and the cross" what he predetermines to see. Luther's position rests entirely upon the acceptance by faith of the claim that it is in the cross that God has revealed himself and that this revelation is our place of beginning. But the point here is only to indicate that Luther, like Barth and Kraemer, understands Romans 1:18-22 in a way quite different to the interpretations of Dodd, Knox, and the other scholars quoted above. As Pinomaa says, "Luther rejects the works of divine creation as a source of knowledge of God. He does so on the basis of Romans 1, according to which the heathen did not reach knowledge of God by beholding these works."⁶³

The Crucial Question

The problem being expressed here as to what is the biblical perspective for the world mission of the church could be illustrated by other examples. But these passages are sufficient to indicate the difficulty. It has not been the intention of the writer to make an exhaustive study nor to argue for one exegesis as against another. His purpose, rather, has been to point out that

62. *Faith Victorious*, trans. Walter J. Kukkonen (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1963), pp. 1-11.

63. *Ibid.*, p. 3.

there are viable alternatives. It is of course perfectly legitimate to opt for one position or the other. The writer is not appealing for an "on the fence" attitude. But what cannot be done, he believes, is to use the scripture passages with the implication that only one possibility exists. For instance, whether the view of general revelation is sound or not, one cannot quote Acts 14:17, "yet he did not leave himself without witness," or John 1:9, "the light that enlightens every man" as though these passages automatically and implicitly express a concept of general revelation or a Greek *logos* idea. Unfortunately this appears to be done in some of the discussion today. Neither can one quote other passages in Romans or elsewhere as though they automatically disproved general revelation.

It would seem wise, rather, to recognize that more than we think, our theological perspective determines the content of our "biblical view." A clear "biblical view" may not always be implicit in the Bible passages themselves. Such recognition could drive those of us within the Christian tradition to a more serious "centering down" upon the essential gospel we proclaim—Jesus Christ and him crucified—and to distinguish this gospel more clearly from the ever changing cultural and religious milieu of the day—whether of our day or of a day past and gone (demythologizing). Hendrik Kraemer tried a generation ago to force this issue upon us at the Madras Conference of the International Missionary Council. But we misunderstood him and have since been "deadlocked" on a false issue—the issue of continuity or discontinuity as between Christianity and other religions. This is not to disparage the value—up to a point—of renewed efforts at establishing "biblical views." But it is to point out that they can be a mere re-mythologizing in line with a certain world view, and thus more confusing than enlightening, especially in a world where the onslaught of secularization has made any kind of "religious" view seem *passe*. Actually modern man is not interested in a "biblical view." The crucial question which we confront as we move into dialogue is: What is the gospel? What is the faith existence which we carry with us into such dialogue? Unless we are clear at this point, dialogue may degenerate into mere ecumenical sentimentalism.

Joseph B. Bustillos
MT 533: Theology of Religious Encounter
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Essay Review: Dialogue, Encounter, Even Confrontation, by John R. Stott.

Dr. Stott presents a balanced Conservative Evangelical point of view regarding what "has become the ecumenical fashion," "Dialogue with men of other faiths." He quickly makes two points. The first point is the primacy of Preaching in the Church. This delineates to the conclusion that proclamation and not dialogue (as understood to mean the education of Christian on Christianity by non-Christians) is the function of the Church. The second point is that preaching is not monologue but true dialogue. "... Good Christian preaching is always dialogical, in the sense that it engages the minds of the listeners and speaks to them with relevance." (158) I liked his definition of Dialogue (taken from the National Evangelical Anglican Congress, 1967):

Dialogue is a conversation in which each party is serious in his approach both to the subject and to the other person, and desires to listen and learn as well as to speak and instruct."

He then goes on to show the presence of Dialogue in Bible, from YHWH in the Old Testament to Jesus, Peter and Paul in the New Testament. He then presents his four-part theology of Elenctics and four-part theology of True Dialogue. It should be noted that Elenctics seems to be merely sensitive witnessing and True Dialogue is careful or thoughtful listening. Good things to practice.

The one thing that bothered me about this article was his equation of preaching equals proclamation. Perhaps that's a prejudice on my part (being a non-preacher, at the moment). I'm sure he'd see one to one communication or just "small group conversation" as possibly being a part of proclamation. Another thing that bothered me was how he view proclamation and dialogue as the act of preaching and the act of dialogue. Granted it seems foolish to talk about these two things outside of the context of actions, but it seems that his opponents view particularly dialogue as being more than an act but fundamentally as a attitude or state of mind. He clears this up toward the end when he discusses "true" dialogue, but while reading those opening paragraphs that bothered me.

not quite: it is the process of bringing to a person's consciousness an awareness of what he has failed to do with God in the light of God's bounty to him... the process of bringing people under conviction

Dialogue, Encounter, Even Confrontation

John R. Stott

Evangelical Protestants have had sharp, negative reactions against some expositions of dialogue with people of other faiths. An acknowledged evangelical leader, one of the framers of the 1974 Lausanne Covenant, presents here a biblical basis for "true dialogue," as well as the historical background for the "conservative Christian's argument against dialogue" which considers it as "bordering on treason against Jesus Christ." John R. Stott, a preacher in the Church of England, argues that "true dialogue" is a mark of Christian authenticity, humility, integrity, and sensitivity. But there is need also for encounter, even confrontation (what he calls "elencitics"), "in which we seek both to disclose the inadequacies and falsities of non-Christian religion and to demonstrate the adequacy and truth, absoluteness and finality of the Lord Jesus Christ." This article, from chapter three ("Dialogue") in Stott's *Christian Mission in the Modern World*, published in 1975 by InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL 60515, is reprinted with permission.

"Mission" denotes the self-giving service which God sends his people into the world to render, and includes both evangelism and socio-political action. Within this broadly conceived mission a certain urgency attaches to evangelism, and priority must be given to it; "evangelism" means announcing or proclaiming the good news of Jesus. . . . Is there any room for "dialogue" in the proclamation of the good news? It is well known that during the past decade or two the concept of "dialogue with men of other faiths" has become

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the ecumenical fashion, and that evangelicals have tended to react rather sharply against it. Is our negative reaction justified? And what are the issues anyway?

Extreme views

Extreme positions have been taken on both sides of this debate. Evangelical Christians have always—and in my judgment rightly—emphasized the indispensable necessity of preaching the gospel, for God has appointed his church to be the herald of the good news. An eloquent summons to proclamation has been issued by Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones in his book *Preaching and Preachers* (Hodder and Stoughton 1971). His first chapter is entitled "The Primacy of Preaching" and on its first page he writes: "to me the work of preaching is the highest and the greatest and the most glorious calling to which anyone can ever be called. If you want something in addition to that I would say without any hesitation that the most urgent need in the Christian Church today is true preaching, and as it is the greatest and most urgent need in the Church, it is obviously the greatest need for the world also" (p. 9). Indeed, because man's essential trouble is his rebellion against God and his need of salvation, therefore "preaching is the primary task of the Church" (p. 25). To his passionate advocacy of preaching Dr Lloyd-Jones has sometimes added his distaste for the concept of dialogue: "God is not to be discussed or debated. . . . Believing what we do about God, we cannot in any circumstances allow Him to become a subject for discussion or debate or investigation . . . as if He were but a philosophical proposition" (pp. 46, 47).

And the same goes for the gospel: the gospel is suitable for proclamation, not for amiable discussion. Now if by "discussion" we have in mind the work of clever diplomats at the conference table, whose objective is to satisfy (even appease) everybody, and whose method is to reach consensus by compromise, I find myself in whole-hearted agreement with Dr Lloyd-Jones. The gospel is a non-negotiable revelation from God. We may certainly discuss its meaning and its

interpretation, so long as our purpose is to grasp it more firmly ourselves and commend it more acceptably to others. But we have no liberty to sit in judgment on it, or to tamper with its substance. For it is God's gospel not ours, and its truth is to be received not criticized, declared not discussed. Having said this, however, it is necessary to add that, properly understood, "dialogue" and "discussion" are two different things.

At the other extreme there is a growing dislike for preaching, or at least for preaching of an authoritative or dogmatic kind. Proclamation is said to be arrogant; the humble way of communication is the way of dialogue. It would be difficult to find a more articulate exponent of this view than Professor J. G. Davies of Birmingham. In his small book *Dialogue with the World* (SCM 1967) he writes: "Monologue is entirely lacking in humility: it assumes that we know all and that we merely have to declare it, to pass it on to the ignorant, whereas we need to seek truth together, that our truth may be corrected and deepened as it encounters the truths of those with whom we are in dialogue" (p. 31). Further, "monologue . . . is deficient in openness" (p. 31), whereas "dialogue involves complete openness" (p. 55). Professor Davies goes on:

To enter into dialogue in this way is not only difficult, it is dangerous. Complete openness means that every time we enter into dialogue our faith is at stake. If I engage in dialogue with a Buddhist and do so with openness I must recognize that the outcome cannot be predetermined either for him or for me. The Buddhist may come to accept Jesus as Lord, but I may come to accept the authority of the Buddha, or even both of us may end up as agnostics. Unless these are *real* possibilities, neither of us is being fully open to the other. . . . To live dialogically is to live dangerously. (p. 55)

For myself I regard this as an intemperate overstatement. It is true that good Christian preaching is always dialogical, in the sense that it engages the minds of the listeners and speaks to them with relevance. But it is not true to say that all monologue is proud. The evangelist who proclaims the gos-

pel is not claiming to "know all," but only to have been put in trust with the gospel. We should also, as I believe and shall soon argue, be willing to enter into dialogue. In doing so we shall learn from the other person both about his beliefs and also (by listening to his critical reaction to Christianity) about certain aspects of our own. But we should not cultivate a total "openness" in which we suspend even our convictions concerning the truth of the gospel and our personal commitment to Jesus Christ. To attempt to do this would be to destroy our own integrity as Christians.

Dialogue in the Bible

In this dialogue about dialogue, perhaps the place to begin is with definition. A more simple and straightforward definition I have not found than that framed at the National Evangelical Anglican Congress held at Keele in 1967: "Dialogue is a conversation in which each party is serious in his approach both to the subject and to the other person, and desires to listen and learn as well as to speak and instruct" (para. 83).

After this definition it is important to note that the living God of the biblical revelation himself enters into a dialogue with man. He not only speaks but listens. He asks questions and waits for the answers. Ever since his question went echoing among the trees of the garden of Eden "where are you?" God has been seeking his fallen creature, and addressing questions to him. Of course the approach of the Infinite to the finite, of the Creator to the creature, of the Holy to the sinful has always been one of gracious self-disclosure. Nevertheless, the form his revelation has taken has often been dialogical. "Gird up your loins like a man," he said to Job. "I will question you, and you shall declare to me" (Job 38:3; 40:7). And his address to Israel through the prophets was full of questions.

'Come now, let us reason together, says the Lord.' . . .
'What wrong did your fathers find in me that they went far from me . . . ?'
'Why do you complain against me?' . . .

Not preaching / but dialogue
Preaching & proclamation
are trying to say

Have you not known? Have you not heard?
 Has it not been told you from the beginning?
 Have you not understood from the foundations of the
 earth? . . .
 How can I give you up, O Ephraim!
 How can I hand you over, O Israel!
 (Isaiah 1:18; Jeremiah 2:5, 29; Isaiah 40:21; Hosea 11:8)

Jesus too, who himself as a boy was found in the temple "sitting among the teachers listening to them and asking them questions" (Luke 2:46), during his public ministry entered into serious conversations with individuals like Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman and the crowds. He seldom if ever spoke in a declamatory, take-it-or-leave-it style. Instead, whether explicitly or implicitly, he was constantly addressing questions to his hearers' minds and consciences. For example, "When . . . the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?" (Matthew 21:40). Again, "which of these three, do you think, proved neighbour to the man who fell among the robbers?" (Luke 10:36). Even after the Ascension when he revealed himself to Saul of Tarsus on the Damascus Road, and the prostrate and blinded Pharisee appeared at first to have been crushed by the vision, Jesus addressed him a rational question: "Why do you persecute me?" and provoked the counterquestions "Who are you, Lord?" and "What shall I do, Lord?" (Acts 9:4, 5; 22:10).

When later Saul began his great missionary journeys as Paul the apostle, it is instructive to notice that some form of dialogue was an integral part of his method. At least Luke not infrequently uses the verb *dialegomai* to describe an aspect of his evangelism, especially during the second and third expeditions. True, there is some uncertainty about the precise meaning of the verb. In classical Greek it meant to "converse" or "discuss" and was particularly associated with the so-called "dialectic" as a means of instruction and persuasion developed in different ways by Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. In the Gospels it is once used of the apostles' argumentative discussion with each other [of] who was the greatest (Mark 9:34). In reference to Paul's ministry Gottlob Schrenk

in Kittel's *Theological Dictionary* (Eerdmans) says that it refers to the "delivering of religious lectures or sermons" but has no reference to "disputation." The Arndt-Gingrich lexicon, on the other hand, though conceding that it sometimes means "simply to speak or preach" (eg Hebrews 12:5), maintains that it is used "of lectures which were likely to end in disputations." The context certainly suggests this too.

Thus in the synagogue at Thessalonica for three weeks "Paul . . . argued with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying 'This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ.'" Luke then adds: "some of them were persuaded" (Acts 17:1-4). Here five words are brought together—arguing, explaining, proving, proclaiming and persuading—which suggest that Paul was actually debating with the Jews, hearing and answering their objections to his message. In Athens we are told that he "argued" both "in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and in the market place every day with those who chanced to be there" (17:17). This is an important addition because it shows that his reasoning approach was with casual Gentile passers-by as well as with Jews in the synagogue. In Corinth he "argued in the synagogue every sabbath and persuaded Jews and Greeks" (18:4), while at Ephesus he first "entered the synagogue and for three months spoke boldly, arguing and pleading about the kingdom of God" and then for two years "argued daily in the hall of Tyrannus" possibly for as long as five hours a day (19:8-10; cf. 18:19).

Paul also used the same method in Christian preaching, for during the famous "breaking of bread" at Troas, during which the young man Eutychus fell asleep with nearly disastrous consequences, *dialegomai* is again used to describe Paul's address (Acts 20:7, 9). The last example is also interesting, because we find Paul having a dialogue with the procurator Festus, arguing with him in private about "justice, self-control and future judgment" until Festus grew alarmed and terminated the conversation (24:25). In summary, then, we may say that Paul included some degree of dialogue in most if not all his preaching, to Christians and non-

concept of dialogue & the act of dialogue.

Christians, to Jews and Gentiles, to crowds and individuals, on formal and informal occasions. Indeed, to add a final text, Paul seems to have expected all the disciples of Jesus to be involved in continuous dialogue with the world, for he urged the Colossians: "Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer every one" (Colossians 4:6). Here are Christians in such close contact with "outsiders" (v. 5) that they are able both to speak to them (with gracious and salty speech) and to answer their questions.

The kind of "dialogue" which was included in Paul's ministry was, however, very different from what is often meant by the word today. For Paul's dialogue was clearly a part of his proclamation and subordinate to his proclamation. Moreover, the subject of his dialogue with the world was one which he always chose himself, namely Jesus Christ, and its object was always conversion to Jesus Christ. If this was still the position few who hesitate about dialogue would disagree with it. But often the modern dialogue of Christians with non-Christians seems to savour rather of unbelief than of faith, of compromise than of proclamation. It is time now to investigate this argument against dialogue. Afterwards I will seek to marshal some arguments in favour of true dialogue....

The Argument Against Dialogue

The conservative Christian's argument against dialogue as bordering on treason against Jesus Christ can best be understood historically. The World Missionary Conference at Edinburgh in 1910 took place in an atmosphere of great confidence. I do not call it "self-confidence," because certainly their confidence was in God. Nevertheless, they confidently predicted the imminent collapse of the non-Christian religions. Temple Gairdner in his official account of the conference could write: "The spectacle of the advance of the Christian Church along many lines of action to the conquest of the five great religions of the modern world is one of singular interest and grandeur" (*Edinburgh 1910*, p. 135). This mood

was rudely shaken by the outbreak of the First World War four years later. And at the second missionary conference at Jerusalem in 1928 the atmosphere was already different. Delegates were aware of the growth of secularism, and even suggested that against this universal enemy a common religious front was necessary.

Ten years later, in 1938, the third ecumenical missionary conference was held at Tambaram near Madras. Its key figure was the Dutchman Henrik Kraemer, whose book *The Christian Message in a non-Christian World* had been written and published shortly before the conference assembled. Partly under the influence of Karl Barth's dialectic, in which he opposed religion to revelation as man's religiosity over against God's word, Kraemer stressed that there was a fundamental "discontinuity" between the religions of man and the revelation of God. He rejected both aggressive Christian missions on the one hand and on the other the notion that Christ was the fulfilment of non-Christian religions (popularized by R. N. Farquhar's *The Crown of Hinduism*, OUP 1913), and in their place he urged the uncompromising announcement of the gospel, although "in a persuasive and winning manner" (p. 302). He called the church to repossess its faith "in all its uniqueness and adequacy and power," and added: "We are bold enough to call men out from these [sc. other religions] to the feet of Christ. We do so because we believe that in him alone is the full salvation which man needs" (quoted by James A. Scherer in his contribution to *Protestant Cross-Currents in Mission*, Abingdon 1968, p. 34).

As the Tambaram Conference closed, the black storm clouds of the Second World War, and of the new paganism it threatened to unleash, were already darkening the horizon, and when the war ended and ecumenical activity began again, "the coming dialogue between east and west" which Kraemer had foretold was already being canvassed by other voices. Both Protestant and Roman Catholic theologians began to formulate very differently from Hendrik Kraemer the relation between Christianity and other religions. In 1963 H. R. Schlette could write that "anyone who determines his

ethical and actual individual way of life on the basis of an authentic desire to live a human life according to an order founded on truth, attains salvation" (quoted by Carl F. Hallencreutz in *New Approaches to Men of Other Faiths*, WCC 1969, p. 78). Similarly, Karl Rahner in his *Theological Investigations V* (Darton, Longman & Todd), began to popularize the idea that the sincere non-Christian should rather be thought of as an "anonymous Christian": "Christianity does not simply confront the member of an extra-Christian religion as a mere non-Christian but as someone who can and must already be regarded in this or that respect as an anonymous Christian." In consequence, "the proclamation of the gospel does not simply turn someone absolutely abandoned by God and Christ into a Christian, but turns an anonymous Christian into someone who also knows about his Christian belief in the depths of his grace-endowed being by objective reflection and by the profession of faith. . . ." It is in line with this thinking that Raymond Pannikar has written his book *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism* (Darton, Longman & Todd) and that Professor John Macquarrie has urged the replacement of competitive missions (adherents of different religions trying to convert each other) with a common mission undertaken by all the great religions together "to the loveless and unloved masses of humanity."

One of the fundamental beliefs of ecumenical scholars who think and write like this today is that Christ is already present everywhere, including other religions. This being so, it is in their view presumptuous of the Christian missionary to talk of "bringing" Christ with him into a situation; what he does is first to "find" Christ already there and then maybe to "unveil" him. Some go further still. They not only deny that missionaries take Christ with them, or can be the media of Christ's self-revelation to the non-Christian; they even suggest that it is the non-Christian who is the bearer of Christ's message to the Christian. For example, during the discussions on dialogue in Section II at Uppsala [General Assembly, 1968] one of the World Council's secretariat proposed the following wording: "In this dialogue Christ speaks

through the brother, correcting our limited and distorted understanding of the truth." If this wording had been agreed, not only would the non-Christian have been acclaimed as "the brother," but the only reference to Christ speaking in the dialogue would have been of his speech to the Christian through the non-Christian. This would have turned evangelism upside down and presented dialogue as the proclamation of the gospel to the Christian by the non-Christian! Fortunately, as a result of pressure from evangelical Christians, the wording was changed to read: "Christ speaks in this dialogue, revealing himself to those who do not know him and correcting the limited and distorted knowledge of those who do." I do not think we should object to this formulation.

But is Christ present in the non-Christian world? In our increasingly pluralistic society and syncretistic age this is the basic theological question which we cannot dodge. It would be facile to reply with a bare "yes" or "no." We need rather to ask ourselves what Christ's apostles taught on this crucial issue. We will look in turn at statements of Peter, Paul and John.

Peter began his sermon to Cornelius: "Truly I perceive that God shows no partiality, but in every nation any one who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him" (Acts 10:34, 35). Some have argued from this assertion that sincere religious and righteous people are saved, especially because the story begins with an angel's statement to Cornelius that "your prayers and your alms have ascended as a memorial before God" (v. 4). But such a deduction is inadmissible. To declare that a man who fears God and practises righteousness is "acceptable" to him cannot mean that he is "accepted" in the sense of being "justified." The rest of the story makes this plain. This sincere, godfearing and righteous man still needed to hear the gospel. Indeed, when Peter later recounted to the Jerusalem church what had happened, he specifically recorded the divine promise to Cornelius about Peter, namely that "he will declare to you a message by which you will be saved" (Acts 11:14). And the Jerusalem church reacted to Peter's account by saying: "then to the Gentiles also God has

"close to the kingdom"

granted repentance unto life" (11:18). It is clear then that, although in some sense "acceptable" to God, Cornelius before his conversion had neither "salvation" nor "life."

In his two sermons to heathen audiences, in Lystra and in Athens, the apostle Paul spoke of God's providential activity in the pagan world. Although in the past God had allowed all the nations "to walk in their own ways," he said, yet even then "he did not leave himself without witness," for he "did good" to all people, especially by giving them rain, fruitful seasons, food and happiness (Acts 14:16, 17).

To the Athenian philosophers Paul added that God the Creator was the sustainer of our life ("since he himself gives to all men life and breath and everything") and the lord of history ("having determined allotted periods and the boundaries" of all men's "habitation") intending that men "should seek God in the hope that they might feel after him and find him." For "he is not far from each one of us" since, as heathen poets had said, "in him we live and move and have our being" and "we are indeed his offspring." What these truths and the Athenians' knowledge of them did, however, was not to enable them to find God but rather to make their idolatry inexcusable. For, having overlooked it in the past, God "now... commands all men everywhere to repent" (Acts 17:22-31).

This sketch Paul filled out in the early chapters of Romans. He affirms there very clearly the universal knowledge of God and of goodness in the heathen world. On the one hand God's "invisible nature, namely his eternal power and deity" are "clearly perceived in the things that have been made," God having "shown it to them" (Romans 1:19, 20). On the other hand, men know something of God's moral law, for he had not only written it on stone tablets at Sinai; he had written it also on men's hearts, in the moral nature they have by creation (2:14, 15). So to some degree, Paul says, all men know God (1:21), know God's law and "know God's decree" that lawbreakers "deserve to die" (1:32). This revelation of God to all men, called "general" because made to all men and "natural" because given in nature and in human nature, is not, however, enough to save them. It is enough

only to condemn them as being "without excuse" (1:21; 2:1; 3:19). For the whole thrust of the early chapters of Romans is that, although men know God, they do not honour him as God but by their wickedness suppress the truth they know (1:18, 21, 25, 28).

We turn now to John, and especially the prologue to the Fourth Gospel. Here he describes Jesus as "the Logos of God," and "the light of men" (John 1:1-3). He also affirms that the light is continually shining in the darkness and that the darkness has not overcome it (v. 5). Next he applies these great axioms to the historical process of revelation. He says of the Logos whom he later identifies as Jesus Christ: "The true light that enlightens every man was coming into the world." Indeed, "he was in the world" all the time (vv. 9, 10). Long before he actually "came" into the world (v. 11) he "was" already in it and was continuously "coming" into it. Moreover, his presence in the world was (and still is) an enlightening presence. He is the real light, of which all other lights are but types and shadows, and as the light he "enlightens every man." Thus "every man," Scripture gives us warrant to affirm, possesses some degree of light by his reason and conscience. And we should not hesitate to claim that everything good, beautiful and true, in all history and in all the earth, has come from Jesus Christ, even though men are ignorant of its origin. At the same time we must add that this universal light is not saving light. For one thing it is but a twilight in comparison with the fulness of light granted to those who follow Jesus as "the light of the world" and to whom is given "the light of life" (John 8:12). For another thing, men have always "loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil." Because of their wilful rejection of the light men are under condemnation (John 3:18-21).

The witness then of Peter, Paul and John is uniform. All three declare the constant activity of God in the non-Christian world. God has not left himself without witness. He reveals himself in nature. He is not far from any man. He gives light to every man. But man rejects the knowledge he has, prefers darkness to light and does not acknowledge the God he knows. His knowledge does not save him; it condemns him

was in the world - not pre-existent but pre-existent fact of the incarnation.

for his disobedience. Even his religiosity is a subtle escape from the God he is afraid and ashamed to meet.

The Place of Elenctics

We do not therefore deny that there are elements of truth in non-Christian systems, vestiges of the general revelation of God in nature. What we do vehemently deny is that these are sufficient for salvation and (more vehemently still) that Christian faith and non-Christian faiths are alternative and equally valid roads to God. Although there is an important place for "dialogue" with men of other faiths (as I shall shortly argue), there is also a need for "encounter" with them, and even for "confrontation," in which we seek both to disclose the inadequacies and falsities of non-Christian religion and to demonstrate the adequacy and truth, absoluteness and finality of the Lord Jesus Christ.

This work is technically called "elenctics," from the Greek verb *elengchein*, to "convince," "convict" or "re-buke," and so to call to repentance. J. H. Bavinck devotes the whole of Part II of his book *An Introduction to the Science of Missions* (Hodder and Stoughton 1954) to this subject, and describes the nature, place, task and main lines of elenctics. He defines it as "the science which unmasks to heathendom all false religions as sin against God, and . . . calls heathendom to a knowledge of the only true God" (p. 222). So important does he consider this science to be that it ought, he urges, "to have a respected position within the context of a theological faculty" (p. 232). For a full understanding of his thesis I must refer the reader to the fifty pages in which he carefully elaborates it. I wish only to draw attention now to a few of his main points.

First, the purpose of elenctics is not to "show the absurdity of heathendom," still less to ridicule other religions or their adherents. It refers chiefly "to the conviction and unmasking of sin, and to the call to responsibility" (p. 226). "In all elenctics the concern is always with the all-important question: What have you done with God?" (p. 223).

Next, the justification for this task is the Bible itself, for

"the Bible from the first page to the last is a tremendous plea against heathenism, against the paganizing tendencies in Israel itself, in short, against the corruption of religion." The Bible also teaches us "concerning the human heart and its sly attempts to seek God and at the same time to escape him" (p. 244).

Thirdly, elenctics is not the harsh or negative activity it may sound. It "can actually be exercised only in living contact with the adherents of other religions." So "in practice I am never concerned with Buddhism, but with a living person and his Buddhism, I am never in contact with Islam but with a Moslem and his Mohammedanism" (p. 240). Further, this living contact must also be a loving contact.

As long as I laugh at his foolish superstition, I look down upon him; I have not yet found the key to his soul. As soon as I understand that what he does in a noticeably naïve and childish manner, I also do and continue to do again and again, although in a different form; as soon as I actually stand next to him, I can in the name of Christ stand in opposition to him and convince him of sin, as Christ did with me and still does each day. (pp. 242-3)

A fourth and final point is that ultimately elenctics is the work of the Holy Spirit. It is he who "convicts" of sin, righteousness and judgment (John 16:8-10). "He alone can call to repentance and we are only means in his hand" (p. 229).

The very concept of "elenctics" is out of accord with the diffident, tolerant mood of today. But no Christian who accepts the biblical view of the evil of idolatry on the one hand and of the finality of Jesus Christ on the other can escape it. Further, only those who see the need for elenctics can also see the need for dialogue and can understand its proper place. Only when we are assured that a true Christian dialogue with a non-Christian is not a sign of syncretism but is fully consistent with our belief in the finality of Jesus Christ, are we ready to consider the arguments by which it may be commended. They are four.

SIN

Bible

people

Holy Spirit

The Argument for Dialogue

First, true dialogue is a mark of authenticity. Let me quote the Uppsala statement:

A Christian's dialogue with another implies neither a denial of the uniqueness of Christ, nor any loss of his own commitment to Christ, but rather that a genuinely Christian approach to others must be human, personal, relevant and humble. In dialogue we share our common humanity, its dignity and fallenness, and express our common concern for that humanity. (Report II, para. 6)

If we do nothing but proclaim the gospel to people from a distance, our personal authenticity is bound to be suspect. Who are we? Those listening to us do not know. For we are playing a role (that of the preacher) and for all they know may be wearing a mask. Besides, we are so far away from them, they cannot even see us properly. But when we sit down alongside them like Philip in the Ethiopian's chariot, or encounter them face to face, a personal relationship is established. Our defences come down. We begin to be seen and known for what we are. It is recognized that we too are human beings, equally sinful, equally needy, equally dependent on the grace of which we speak. And as the conversation develops, not only do we become known by the other, but we come to know him. He is a human being too, with sins and pains and frustrations and convictions. We come to respect his convictions, to feel with him in his pain. We still want to share the good news with him, for we care about it deeply, but we also care now about him with whom we want to share it. As the Mexico report put it, "true dialogue with a man of another faith, requires a concern both for the Gospel and for the other man. Without the first, dialogue becomes a pleasant conversation. Without the second, it becomes irrelevant, unconvincing or arrogant" (*Witness in Six Continents*, 1964), p. 146). Dialogue puts evangelism into an authentically human context.

Secondly, true dialogue is a mark of humility. I do not

mean by this that proclamation is always arrogant, for true proclamation is a setting forth of Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord, and not in any sense or degree a parading of ourselves. What I mean rather is that as we listen to another person, our respect for him as a human being made in God's image grows. The distance between us diminishes as we recall that if he is fallen and sinful, so are we. Further, we realize that we cannot sweep away all his cherished convictions with a brash, unfeeling dismissal. We have to recognize humbly that some of his misconceptions may be our fault, or at least that his continuing rejection of Christ may be in reality a rejection of the caricature of Christ which he has seen in us or in our fellow Christians. As we listen to him, we may have many such uncomfortable lessons to learn. Our attitude to him changes. There may after all have been some lingering sense of superiority of which we were previously unconscious. But now no longer have we any desire to score points or win a victory. We love him too much to boost our ego at his expense. Humility in evangelism is a beautiful grace.

Thirdly, true dialogue is a mark of integrity. For in the conversation we listen to our friend's real beliefs and problems, and divest our minds of the false images we may have harboured. And we are determined also ourselves to be real. Bishop Stephen Neill distinguishes between dialogue and an "amiable discussion." In an article about Bangkok published in *The Churchman* in December 1973 he wrote:

Anyone brought up in the Platonic tradition of dialogue knows well the intense seriousness involved; Socrates and his interlocutors are concerned about one thing only—that the truth should emerge. This is the concern of the Christian partner in dialogue. If Christ is the Truth, then the only thing that matters is that Christ should emerge, but Christ as the Truth makes categorical demands on the individual for total, unconditional and exclusive commitment to himself. It may well be that I may discover in dialogue how inadequate my own self-commitment is; but, out of respect for the freedom and dignity of the partner, I may not hope and ask for him anything less than I ask and hope for myself. As experi-

Authentic
Christian
love/action

conviction
truth

humility

ence shows, it is extremely difficult to find in any of the non-Christian religions and anti-religions a partner who is prepared to engage in dialogue on this level of seriousness.

Yet such integrity is essential to true dialogue.

Fourthly, true dialogue is a mark of *sensitivity*. Christian evangelism falls into disrepute when it degenerates into stereotypes. It is impossible to evangelize by fixed formulae. To force a conversation along predetermined lines in order to reach a predetermined destination is to show oneself grievously lacking in sensitivity both to the actual needs of our friend and to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Such insensitivity is therefore a failure in both faith and love. Dialogue, however, to quote from Max Warren "is in its very essence an attempt at mutual 'listening,' listening in order to understand. Understanding is its reward" (from an unpublished paper entitled *Presence and Proclamation*, read at a European Consultation on Mission Studies in April 1968). It is this point which was picked up in the Lausanne Covenant, which contains two references to dialogue. On the one hand it says firmly that we "reject as derogatory to Christ and the gospel every kind of syncretism and dialogue which implies that Christ speaks equally through all religions and ideologies" (para. 3). But on the other it says with equal firmness that "that kind of dialogue whose purpose is to listen sensitively in order to understand" is actually "indispensable to evangelism" (para. 4).^{*} The principle was stated centuries ago in the Book of Proverbs: "If one gives answer before he hears, it is his folly and shame" (Proverbs 18:13).

^{*}See "The Lausanne Covenant," in *Mission Trends* No. 2, pp. 239-48 —Eds,

examples of it in three different contexts, the first among Hindus in India, the second among Moslems in the Arab world, and the third in the industrial areas of Britain.

Dialogue with Hindus

My first example is E. Stanley Jones, the American Methodist missionary in India, who flourished between the wars. He was a prolific writer. His two best-known books, in which he described the principles of his work, are probably *The Christ of the Indian Road* (Abingdon Press, 1925) and *Christ at the Round Table* (Hodder and Stoughton 1928).

It was during one of his missions that a Hindu invited him to a tea-party in his home in order that he might meet some of the leading Hindus of the local community. They sat in a circle on the floor and talked. Stanley Jones asked them what their reaction would be if Christ were to come to India direct, disassociated from Westernism. The mayor of the city interrupted: 'I hear you speak about finding Christ. What do you mean by it?' In reply Stanley Jones told the story of his conversion. 'Now tell me', said the mayor, 'how I could find him' (*Round Table*, pp. 19, 20). Out of that conversation Stanley Jones' famous 'Round Table Conferences' grew. He would invite about fifteen adherents of other faiths—mostly educated people like judges, government officials, doctors, lawyers and religious leaders—and five or six Christians, mostly Indians.

In the dialogue which developed the emphasis was neither on the rival civilizations of East and West, nor on the rival Scriptures of Hindus and Christians, nor even on the rival personalities of Krishna and Christ, but on what each man's religion meant to him in his own experience. This has been criticized for example by Hendrik Kraemer, and we cannot help agreeing that human testimony does seem rather to have eclipsed the divine objective testimony to Christ in Scripture. Nevertheless, God honoured it. Once a Hindu who had written a savage assault on Christianity, using the latest ammunition supplied by the Rationalistic Association of Britain of which he was a member, was challenged to

speaking at a deeper personal level and was immediately disconcerted and silenced. Then a Christian youth with bare feet and wearing simple homespun spoke naturally of what the Lord Jesus meant to him. 'There were milleniums of spiritual and social culture between the rest of the group and this youth', wrote Stanley Jones, but no one could gainsay the reality, the authenticity with which he spoke (*Round Table*, p. 52).

Two particular aspects of Stanley Jones' 'Round Table' method impress me. The first is his insistence on fairness and mutual respect. Much western writing about Hinduism had been very polemical, and had unjustly concentrated on the caste system and on idolatry, child widows and the abuses of temple Hinduism rather than on the philosophic thought of the Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita. 'I felt I would be unfair', wrote Stanley Jones, 'if I did not let these representatives speak and interpret their own faith...Each was given the chance to say the best he could about his own faith' (*ibid.*, pp. 8, 9). At the beginning of each conference Stanley Jones would say: 'Let everyone be perfectly free, for we are a family circle; we want each one to feel at home, and we will listen with reverence and respect to what each man has to share' (p. 22). As a result, the old 'battle of wits' gave place to an atmosphere of 'deep seriousness' (p. 23).

'We have tried to understand sympathetically the viewpoint of the other man' (p. 48).

'The deepest things of religion need a sympathetic atmosphere. In an atmosphere of debate and controversy the deepest things, and hence the real things of religion, wither and die' (p. 15).

'The Crusaders conquered Jerusalem and found in the end that Christ was not there. They had lost him through the very spirit and methods by which they sought to serve him. Many more modern and more refined crusaders end in that same barrenness of victory' (p. 11).

Yet this does not mean that Stanley Jones was indifferent to the results of his Round Table Conferences, for he was an evangelist. The second impressive point about his conferences is that in them all the supremacy of Jesus Christ was apparent.

'There was not a single situation that I can remember where before

the close of the Round Table Conference Christ was not in moral and spiritual command of the situation.'

'At the end everything else had been pushed to the edges as irrelevant and Christ controlled the situation' (p. 50).

'No-one could sit through these Conferences and not feel that Christ was Master of every situation, not by loud assertion, or through the pleading of clever advocates, but by what he is and does' (p. 56).

At the close of one conference a Hindu said: 'Today eight of us have spoken and none of us has found; five of you Christians have spoken and all of you seem to have found. This is very extraordinary' (p. 55). During another conference a Hindu lawyer got up, took the flowers from the table, walked across the room, laid them at the feet of a Christian, touched his feet and said: 'You have found God. You are my guru' (p. 56).

Dialogue with Moslems

My second example concerns not the Hindu but the Moslem world. There has been an honorable succession of scholarly and dedicated Christian missionaries to Moslems. One has only to mention the names of Henry Martyn, Samuel Zwemer and Temple Gairdner to realize what great men of God have given their minds and their lives to the task of communicating Christ to the followers of Mohammed. In our own generation one of the best-known names in this field is Bishop Kenneth Cragg, whose dialogical approach to Moslems seems to have been the main inspiration of the series of 'Christian Presence' books which Canon Max Warren has edited. Kenneth Cragg's full statement appears in his book *The Call of the Minaret* (Lutterworth 1956). He interprets the Muezzin's call not only as an explicit summons to prayer addressed to Moslems, but also implicitly as a call to Christians to respond to the challenge of the Moslem world. So his book is divided into two main parts, the first entitled 'Minaret and Muslim', in which he expounds the essentials of Muslim belief, and the second 'Minaret and Christian', in which

he issues his fivefold call to us—a call to understanding, to service, to retrieval (the attempt to retrieve the situation in which Moslems are so deeply suspicious of Christians), to interpretation and to patience.

In reading the book two particular emphases have struck me. The first is Bishop Cragg's stress on what he calls 'the ambition for understanding' (p. viii). If we want to be understood, we must first ourselves struggle to understand. And the kind of understanding he envisages is not merely the academic knowledge which may be gained by a study of Islamics but the far more intimate awareness which comes from the fullest meeting with Muslims. It is from people not just from books that we shall come to understand. The Christian 'must strive to enter into the daily existence of the Muslims, as believers, adherents and men' (p. 189).

To begin with, the Christian must understand what Islam means to the Moslem. We must 'seek to know it, as far as may be, from within. We wish to hear at the minaret what it is which greets every rising sun and salutes every declining day for millions of contemporary men, and thus to enter with them across the threshold of the mosque into their world of meaning' (p. 34). But next the Christian must also understand how Christianity looks to the Moslem. The Christian must feel the shame of the Crusades and of the bitter Medieval polemic against Islam, and grasp the Muslim's abhorrence of western imperialism and secularism, and his utter non-comprehension of the west's unjust espousal of Israel at the Arabs' expense. The Christian must also strive to understand what Bishop Cragg calls the Muslim's 'massive misunderstandings' (p. 319) of Christian theology—of the Christian doctrines of God and the Trinity, of Christ and the cross, and of salvation.

But the minaret's call to the Christian is not to understanding only. It is also, secondly, to action, and that both negatively and positively. Bishop Cragg uses the word 'retrieval' to indicate the work of restitution which we Christians have to perform. 'Among the factors contributing to the rise of Islam', he writes, 'was the Christian failure of the Church. It was a failure in love, in purity,

and in fervour, a failure of the spirit...Islam developed in an environment of imperfect Christianity' (p. 245), even of a 'delinquent Christianity' (p. 262). So the Christian

'yearns to undo the alienation and to make amends for the past by as full a restitution as he can achieve of the Christ to Whom Islam is a stranger. The objective is not, as the Crusaders believed, the repossession of what Christendom has lost, but the restoration to Muslims of the Christ Whom they have missed' (pp. 245-6).

'Let it be clear that the retrieval is not territorial...The retrieval is spiritual. It aims not to have the map more Christian but Christ more widely known...The retrieval does not mean taking back cathedrals from mosques, but giving back the Christ....To restore Christ transcends all else' (pp. 256-7).

Already Bishop Cragg's concept of 'retrieval' has become positive. It leads naturally to his next call, which is for interpretation.

'If Christ is what Christ is, He must be uttered. If Islam is what Islam is, that "must" is irresistible. Wherever there is misconception, witness must penetrate: wherever there is obscuring of the beauty of the cross it must be unveiled: wherever men have missed God in Christ He must be brought to them again' (p. 334).

'We present Christ for the sole, sufficient reason that He deserves to be presented' (p. 335).

So Bishop Cragg gives himself to the work of interpretation, and in so doing traverses five major theological areas—the Scriptures, the person of Jesus, the cross, the doctrine of God, and the church. Throughout he pleads for patience, for 'patience with monumental misunderstandings which must somehow be removed' (p. 355), indeed for 'that travail in patience which is the Christian mission' (p. 347).

Bishop Stephen Neill writes similarly moving words in his chapter on Islam in his *Christian Faith and Other Faiths* (OUP 1961):

'Christians must persist in their earnest invitation to true dialogue; they must exercise endless patience and refuse to be discouraged. And the burden of all their invitation must be "Consider Jesus"...

We have no other message...It is not the case that the Muslim has seen Jesus of Nazareth and has rejected him; he has never seen him, and the veil of misunderstanding and prejudice is still over his face...' (pp. 65, 66, 69).

Dialogue in industrial Britain

My third example of Christian dialogue brings us to post-Christian Britain, and to the concern of Bishop David Sheppard for the unreached industrial masses of our own country. It is well known that after his Islington curacy he served for eleven years as Warden of the Mayflower Family Centre in Canning Town, before becoming Bishop of Woolwich in 1969 and now Bishop of Liverpool. My quotations are from his book *Built as a City* (Hodder and Stoughton) published in 1974. His overriding concern is that

'the Church's life in big cities has been marked by its inability to establish a strong, locally rooted Christian presence among the groups that society leaves without voice or power' (p. 11).

'Great efforts have been made over the years by many churches in urban and industrial areas...But in spite of it all locally rooted churches with strong local leadership are rarely to be seen' (p. 36).

Consequently urban mission 'is not a marginal subject for Christians' but rather 'one of the priorities today in God's work' (p. 16). 'The gap between Church and world, and especially the world of industry and manual work, is historically wide and contemporaneously massive' (p. 254). What if anything can be done?

Being the modest man he is, David Sheppard tells no dramatic success story. But he lays down certain basic indigenous principles: 'The Church which will make Jesus Christ and His claims a serious adult proposition will need to have at least four characteristics: a Church of and for the area; a believing and worshipping Church; a common life providing unjudging and thought-provoking fellowship, and local leaders and decision-makers' (p. 256). Then after the principles he gives some illustrations of how an

indigenous working class church can emerge. He writes first of the need for 'bridge-building'. Christians have to care enough to give priority in their time 'to join together with other people in the community', and together to identify and then to tackle some of the important social issues of their own locality (p. 258).

From bridge-building he moves to friendship. He tells us that in 1960 he and his wife Grace made a decision: 'we set aside every Thursday evening as a couple to meet couples who did not come to church but with whom we had good links'. On alternate Thursdays they visited couples in their homes and entertained couples in their own home.

'We said in the invitation that there was a discussion at the end of the evening. In our flat there was always background music, for a visit to a vicar's home is a nerve-racking adventure for non-church people, and sitting on the edge of chairs in silence is to be avoided. A cup of tea, gossip, sometimes a noisy game called Pit, another cup of tea and some sandwiches and half an hour's discussion. On evenings like these after some had gone home, and in visits to homes, a high proportion of the best conversations started at 10.30 p.m.' (p. 259).

From bridge-building through friendship expressed in informal evenings of relaxed discussion they moved to a more serious 'searching-group'. 'Five couples came. They already had the self-confidence that they would not be thought foolish whatever ideas they expressed. I learned then just how powerful a learning weapon has been created when a "talking-group" has come into being, whose members sense that the others feel the same way about life' (p. 260). After two and half years, David Sheppard could write, 'a number of local couples were convinced Christians'. Canon David Edwards, reviewing the book in the *Church Times* (25 January 1974) commented: 'His book is pre-eminently a call to patience in real life and real love. He summons us to keep on keeping on.'

I hope and believe that these three examples, although from very different contexts—Hindu, Moslem and post-Christian—all illustrate the same marks of a true Christian dialogue, which I have called authenticity, humility, integrity and sensitivity.

Dialogue is a token of genuine Christian love, because it indicates our steadfast resolve to rid our minds of the prejudices and caricatures which we may entertain about other people; to struggle to listen through their ears and look through their eyes so as to grasp what prevents them from hearing the gospel and seeing Christ; to sympathize with them in all their doubts, fears and 'hang-ups'. No one has expressed this better than Lord Ramsey of Canterbury in his little critique of secular theology called *Images Old and New* (SPCK 1963). He insists upon our duty to 'go out and put ourselves with loving sympathy inside the doubts of the doubting, the questions of the questioners, and the loneliness of those who have lost the way' (p. 14). For such sympathy will involve listening, and listening means dialogue. It is once more the challenge of the Incarnation, to renounce evangelism by inflexible slogans, and instead to involve ourselves sensitively in the real dilemmas of men.

ROBERT L. LINDSEY

Christian leaders and groups increasingly raise questions about whether believers in Jesus should speak to Jews about following the Nazarene, the man of Galilee. At stake is the question of whether the Christian mission to the Jews should be given up.

Many years ago Reinhold Niebuhr declared that missionary activities among the Jews are *wrong not only because they are futile and have little fruit. . . . They are wrong because the two faiths despite differences are sufficiently alike for the Jew to find God more easily in terms of his own religious heritage than by subjecting himself to the hazard of guilt feelings involved in conversion to a faith which, whatever its excellencies, must appear to him as a symbol of an oppressive majority culture. . . . Practically nothing can purify the symbol of Christ as the image of God in the imagination of the Jew from the taint with which ages of Christian oppression in the name of Christ have tainted it.*

Paul Tillich made similar statements. Since that time a quarter of a century ago, influential Protestant and Catholic leaders have added their voices to the protests of Niebuhr and Tillich and have moderated Christian fervor for and interest in evangelization of that part of Israel which is unwilling to consider the claims of Jesus or to follow him—the majority of the Jewish people today.

How should Christians understand the people called the Jews? How should Christians approach Jewish people?

Is the question simple?

Modern Jews and Rabbinic Judaism

Many Christian thinkers insist that traditional Christian concern for the salvation of the Jewish people be put aside. They argue that Jews adhere to rabbinic faith, as set forth in the Bible and the Talmud. Though vast numbers of modern Jews have only the most tenuous ties with rabbinic faith, these Christians take for granted that Jews normally feel strong enough ties with Jewish history to accept rabbinic Judaism as normative.

Separation between Judaism and Christianity

Second, these Christians and most contemporary Jews take for granted that to be Jewish is to be non-Christian. The Christian who chooses to become a Jew can no longer be called Christian, and the Jew who chooses to follow Jesus can no longer be called a Jew.

These assumptions are based on the late, post-biblical semantics of our era. The earliest Christians would have been shocked to be told that they were not Jewish. Even those of Gentile background who joined the Jewish-Christian synagogues were declared no longer Gentiles or

pagans (1 Cor 12:1); because of their decision to follow Jesus the Messiah they were no longer "separate from the commonwealth of Israel" (Eph 2:12). Only in Romans 11 does the Apostle Paul refer to people of Gentile background as Gentiles; this usage is found in no other passage and seems to have been composed in irony.

Only the greatest efforts on the part of Chrysostom in Constantinople and other Greek Christians who feared the strength of the local synagogues and their proselyting leaders succeeded in sundering church from synagogue in the popular mind. In the fourth century in North Africa, where Christians were buried as members of a Jewish sect, Augustine counseled Christians to "cease calling yourselves Jews." Frederick M. Schweitzer has described this development in church history: *More and more insistence was made that Christians alone were heirs to the biblical promises, an inheritance which Jews had forfeited by their refusal to accept Jesus; furthermore, that his death had made them guilty of deicide; that as a people they were eternally hateful to God; that no punishment or degradation was too extreme for them; that they were given over to devil worship; that they were a plague with whom Christians should not consort; that they were pariahs for whom there could be no salvation* (1971:72).

We must not accuse those who take for granted the separation between Judaism and Christianity of in any way desiring to hallow the methods by which the two became totally separate. But we must ask whether the contrast between the semantics of the New Testament and those of the following two centuries does not give us some hint of a different assumption which might provide a basis for developing a theology for Jewish-Christian relations.

History of Antisemitism

Third, these Christian thinkers tell us that in the history of antisemitism it was largely Christians' words against the Jews which kept antisemitism alive, and that because of this "Christian" involvement in persecution of the Jews, no Christians should feel they have a moral right to speak to Jews with the intention of persuading them to acknowledge Jesus as Lord.

Without doubt Christians in the West bear an enormous load of guilt at this point, and anyone sensitive to moral concerns cannot help but wonder if this contention is true. This raises the question of collective guilt. As a Christian, how responsible am I for false ideas spread by people calling themselves Christians? How responsible am I for anti-Jewish acts perpetrated by people calling themselves Christians?

Within limits, we must acknowledge the reality of collective guilt in many social situations. But how far shall I go in beating my breast for the sins of Christians with whom I am connected only in name? Because my name is Lindsey do I have to repent of the rotten things my uncle of the same name did? Every time I write a letter to an Israeli newspaper complaining about an anti-Christian attitude or legal restriction against non-Jews, must I apologize for all

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the things people calling themselves Christians have done to the Jews throughout history?

Raising the question in this way suggests a negative answer. The same logic has been used by antisemites; the Jews killed Christ; therefore all Jews are Christ-killers. What thoughtful Christian today would blame Menachem Begin or Teddy Kollek or a chief rabbi for the primarily Sadducaic act of bringing about the Roman crucifixion of Jesus? Just a touch of paranoia is evident when modern Christians not yet forty years old go about repenting of Adolf Hitler's sins against Jews to Jews also under forty.

Rejection of Jewish Identity

In the fourth place, these Christian thinkers point out that, practically speaking, in our day Jews who become Christians automatically reject their Jewishness. Therefore the person who convinces a Jew to become a believer in Jesus is guilty of a kind of genocidal act. Being Jewish, according to this logic, is more important than knowing Jesus. Coming from a Jew who rejects Jesus, such a statement is understandable, but Christians who use it reflect a strange, distorted logic which calls into question the kind of faith they espouse.

Prior to the 1967 war I perused the literature produced by Jewish philosophers and intellectuals of the past 100 years and noted that they seem intent on exeging the nigh universal feeling that being Jewish has lost its meaning in the modern world. I came to call this theme "the loss of Jewish meaning." This discovery—that it is difficult to determine who is a Jew or what Jews are once they claim that identity—helps to explain why so many significant movements have arisen among Jews during the past century and half: Orthodoxy, Reformism, Reconstructionism, Zionism.

Orthodoxy finds Jewish meaning in rabbinism. The Reform movements seek meaning in religious renewal based more on the earliest understanding of biblical religion. Reconstructionism looks for meaning in cultic, ethnic pluralism, in which Judaism is one religio-ethnic reality among others. Zionism seeks recognition of the Jewish people as a separate national entity.

In this light we must examine the recent emergence in the United States of a remarkable movement to found Jewish synagogues where people gather who accept Jesus as the Messiah. Now nearly seventy such congregations are scattered throughout that country as leaders work to found still another Jewish movement to bring meaning to Jewishness, this time within Christian or messianic boundaries. Should this group succeed even peripherally in maintaining that being Jewish and being Christian are not mutually exclusive, the automatic assumption that Judaism and Christianity are separate will be challenged.

Jewish and Christian fears for Jewishness

Christians often fear as deeply as Jews that somehow the word "Jew" is in danger of dying a slow, gasping death in a world community that little notices the disappearance of thousands of tribes and families, some religious and some not.

Are Abraham Heschel's words true? *The mission to the Jews is a call to individual Jews to betray the fellowship, the dignity, the sacred history of their people. Very few Christians seem to comprehend what is morally and spiritually involved in supporting such activities. We are*

Jews as we are men. The alternative to our existence as Jews is spiritual suicide, extinction. It is not a change in to something else. Judaism has allies but no substitutes. . . .

Father Gustave Weigel spent the last evening of his life in my study at the Jewish Theological Seminary. We opened our hearts to one another in prayer and contrition and spoke of our own deficiencies, failures, hopes. At one moment I posed the question: Is it really the will of God that there be no more Judaism in the world? Would it really be the triumph of God if the scrolls of the Torah no more be taken out of the ark and the Torah no more read in the synagogue, our ancient Hebrew prayers in which Jesus himself worshipped no more recited, the Passover Seder no more celebrated in our lives, the law of Moses no more observed in our homes? Would it really be ad majorem Dei gloriam to have a world without Jews?

This same emotion-packed concern for the survival of the Jewish people is much more a part of Christian tradition than Heschel seems to realize. The people who most desire that their Jewish friends come to know Jesus as Savior and Lord are the people who most ardently pray for the survival of the Jewish people. Corrie ten Boom, her family, and countless others who tried to save Jews during World War II did so because they believed their Lord intended that they do so. Some people who love Israel also believe that at the name of Jesus every Jewish knee shall bow.

Only in Christian or Muslim lands have Jews survived in significant numbers. In India, where Christians were only a tiny majority, few Jews have survived; they are considered only another tiny religio-ethnic family. In China, early Jewish communities disappeared in the absence of larger tribes or peoples who knew the name Jew from Scripture.

The meaning seems clear. Jews in post-biblical history, separated as non-Christian or non-Muslim, retained their high profile as a divinely ordained community because neither Christians nor Muslims could forget them. The Muslims named them, with Christians, *ahl el-kitah*, people of the Book. Christians saw them as the unbelieving, disobedient children of Abraham who, as the Apostle Paul says, are presently against the gospel but are nonetheless beloved because the fathers had been in covenant with God. Moreover, leaders of the Roman church more than once protected Jews from mob violence, citing the promise of Scripture that "all Israel would be saved"; thus Jews must be kept alive. Such a defense is surely sub-Christian, but it bears out the point that Christendom has a built-in concern for those who call themselves Jews. Jews have a significance for Christians which far surpasses any numerical, intellectual, or economic influence they have attained.

For nearly 200 years, evangelicals of all kinds have speculated about eschatology and the Jewish people. By far the most influential scheme developed is the premillennial view. It assumes that modern Jews are the descendants of the Jews of Jesus' time and earlier, and applies the prophecies of the Old and New Testaments to this people. Premillennialists believe the Jews are non-Christian but will, as a result of their return to the land of Israel and the desperate struggles culminating in the Battle of Armageddon, "look upon him whom they have pierced" and be

saved, becoming the redeemed community which will have the task of winning the non-Jewish world to personal allegiance to Jesus Christ who will be enthroned in Jerusalem and will rule the world for 1,000 years.

According to this view, most of these events will occur after Jesus has returned to take to heaven those who believe in him, sometimes called the "Gentile church."

Most Jews who have established Jewish-Christian congregations in the United States have been influenced by this position in some form. Indeed, according to Chaim Weizmann, first president of the state of Israel, the existence of this vision as a part of the training of Great Britain's leaders made possible the Balfour Declaration.

And, right or wrong, what other scheme could provide Jews with as dramatic and important a place as the one envisioned by these evangelical premillennialists? However disagreeable most Jews may find it, significant numbers of Christians imagine a far brighter future for them than Jews generally can even begin to imagine.

Summary of Christian attitudes toward Judaism

First View: Christian and Jewish religions are distinct

As a whole, Christians and Jews for at least sixteen centuries have thought of themselves as adherents of separate, if related, religions, and as members of separate religio-ethnic communities. Whether Christians relate to Jews primarily as evangelists or as scholars comparing religious notes with their Jewish counterparts, both Christians and Jews assume that their faiths are distinct.

Second View: Jews don't need Christian faith

A growing number of Christian theologians and scholars insist that the history of Christian-Jewish relations has been so catastrophic for Jews that the Christian church has no moral right to support evangelists who try to evangelize the Jewish people. In agreement with Jewish rabbis, they suggest that the rabbinic recension of biblical faith is "good enough for Jews," just as the Christian recension of biblical faith is "good enough for Christians" and perhaps for all non-Jews. Jews do not need Jesus.

Third View: Jews must survive

Underneath all Christian thinking about Jews is a remarkable concern that the Jewish people are too much related to God's self-revelation to go unrecognized and unappreciated in history. The Jews must survive to fulfill their divine role—which Christians normally see as including profession of faith in Jesus of Nazareth as Messiah and Lord. At this point the perpetual Jewish fear for survival meets the Christian desire for Jewish survival. This has important consequences, even political ones, for the Jews. In their own ways, liberal Christians and apocalyptically-minded Christians—and many in between—are dedicated to Jewish survival. Fears like those of Heschel are exaggerated if they are based on the belief that Christians seriously think God wants the disappearance of the synagogue. If Christians genuinely follow biblical modes of thought or those of Jesus himself, Jews have no reason to assume this.

Options for resolving the problem

Orthodoxy

In their somewhat frenetic search for survival, Jews have

been unable to arrive at a solution that can muster a consensus among them. If survival includes hallowing rabbinic insights—including the anti-Jesus stance of the rabbis and popular late tradition—on official and theological levels Jews must normally reject any approach of Christian witness.

Orthodoxy, in its attachment to tradition, stands frightened at the merest appearance of Jewish interest in Jesus. Reform and Reconstruction seek Jewish adjustment to Christian environment but unsuccessfully demand of non-Jews water-tight religio-ethnic compartments comparable to the Jewish entity to ensure Jewish survival. Christian drive for ecumenicity cannot easily accept this. Zionism has succeeded in creating a state which occupies Jews' attention while they seek a national redefinition of Jewishness. But even in Israel people admit that Zionism has failed to draw a plurality of the world's Jewish community to make the giant step of *aliya* or immigration.

Jews for Jesus

Thousands of young American Jews have come to the conclusion that it may be possible to be both Christian and Jewish. Why? Because no movement for Jewish "adjustment" which is also non-Christian has fully succeeded. But also because Jesus remains attractive, however faulty his followers may be.

These young people say something like this: We Jews are an enigma to ourselves. We no longer know why we should be Jewish, though we would like to be. The great modern movements which have promised Jewish survival have let us down. Let's try Jesus. He has managed to win the love and respect of nearly a billion people. And he is a Jew. He is the only way we have not tried. Why not try him?

Of course, other things are behind this "Jews for Jesus" movement: the hippy movement with its despair about war and affluence, many charismatic individuals and fellowships which welcomed Jewish young people as quickly as any other young people, the failure of all modern non-Christian Jewish movements to fill the vacuum American Jewish youth feel. Jesus is the light of the world, and for many a Jew the ancient word, "It is too light a thing for you to gather Israel and revive Jacob, so I will make you a light of the Gentiles," is too patently perfect a description of what Jesus has done in history not to impress in any thinking, questioning Jews today.

Building on both traditions

Another way to see this new thing is in terms of a return to the semantics of the New Testament and early church: People who identify themselves as Jews also believe in Jesus.

We are witnessing the working of the Holy Spirit in history. The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob who remembered his covenant with these patriarchs and delivered their descendants from slavery has again spoken, this time through his Son—as the writer of the Book of Hebrews wrote so long ago.

Not the slightest shade of triumphalism appears among people calling themselves Christians in this new development. Only when Christians abandoned all ideas of forcing conversion or conviction on Jews, and began to share love and concern for them, did Jesus reappear on the scene. Our Lord will not win by force or compulsion, and no one who acts in his name in such a way can expect his patronage or a share of his glory.

I view as distorted all attempts to bypass Jesus in a statement about the relationship between Jews and Christians. It will not do to pick some rich biblical term like covenant, or election, or chosenness, and pretend that this term suggests a way of salvation or blessing to any person, group, or fellowship, apart from the personal choice of the way God has ordained. The burden of the Bible is that only those who respond to God's provision or agency, whether in the person of Moses, an appointed prophet, the angel of the Lord, or the Messiah himself, under the conditions of time which the Almighty himself governs, have a right to expect the joy of God's acceptance and presence.

This does not mean that the ways of dialogue, mission, or witness are meaningless. My own conviction is that the world "mission" is a poor choice now in view of the semantics of our time. A missionary is sent, like Jonah, to people to have no knowledge of the God of Israel. The Jews of today are descendants of the patriarchs, with whom God made his first covenant. Like all people, including Christians, they need to be brought first into a living relationship with God and his anointed.

Of course, two-way conversation and sharing is good. The Bible has a hundred illustrations of it: Abraham getting things straight through conversation with Pharaoh; Moses learning from Jethro; Joshua talking with the elders; David forgiving Bichri; and pre-eminently, Jesus in two dozen teaching conversations with friends and foes. But dialogue does not take the place of witness, sharing, or prayer for one another. It cannot, just as a lecture cannot take the place of a handshake, and a greeting in the street cannot take the place of an invitation to a meal.

The older brother

Sometimes Jews and Christians turn to the Parable of the Older Brother (the story of the Prodigal Son) to illustrate the Jewish-Christian relationship. Franz Rosenzweig incorporated it into his picture of Jews and Christians. More recently it appears in the title of Roy A. Eckardt's book, *The Elder and Younger Brothers: The Encounter of Jews and Christians* (1967).

The parable is useful even if it does not perfectly fit the subject at hand. Originally, Jesus seems to have told it to justify the outcast publicans, sinners, and prostitutes of his day. The prodigal son fit this category. He demanded independence from his father only to lose his way and come penitently to ask his father to take him back as a slave, not a son. The father, overjoyed, prepared a feast in honor of his son's return. When the merrymaking was in full progress, the father discovered the older brother had gone off by himself, refusing to join in the festivities. A dialogue ensued, and the father said, "Son, you are always with me and all I have is yours." The parable ends before we know whether the father succeeded in convincing the older brother to join the merrymaking.

Rosenzweig was intrigued by the father's words to the older brother: "You are always with me." Rosenzweig had a moment of truth once in a synagogue on Yom Kippur—at a time when he considered joining the Christian church. Suddenly it occurred to him that the Jews were indeed the older brother and that since they were already "home," already safe in the family circle, they did not need to become Christian. The Gentiles, he decided, need Christ to bring them to repentance, like the younger son. But Jews already share in the life of the father and have no need of Jesus.

Perhaps this parable can be extended to allow the younger brother to represent not only the outcasts of first-century Palestine, but the multitudes which eventually came to the God of Israel through the sub-Apostolic and post-Apostolic church. Other passages in the Synoptic Gospels suggest that Jesus looked forward to the inclusion of a people who had not sought the Lord (Is 65:1), who would "sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob" at a future time. It seems exegetically sound to suppose that Jesus saw the church as the remnant of Israel expanding to include those of the Gentile world who would receive him. If this is so, Rosenzweig's interpretation of the parable is possible.

However, the application of this illustration to modern Jews and Christians does not support the theory that Jews do not need Jesus. The older brother rejected his repentant brother, and worse, refused to come to the celebration their father had arranged for the repentant one. The father tried to show his older son that he had nothing to lose in receiving his brother and that he could only gain by repenting of his unforgiving attitude and joining the feast and entering into the merriment and joy.

Jesus' choice of the word "feast" probably contains a hint of the messianic banquet often referred to in rabbinic sources. Is it possible that the older brother will forever refuse the provision of the father and will reject his call for forgiveness? Anger directed at God is not only useless, it deprives one of God's blessing and deliverance. To understand "all I have is yours" to mean that the stubborn part of Israel which refuses God's Messiah is automatically saved and in harmony with God twists the doctrine that God never stops trying to get individuals and groups to accept his ways and will. Individuals can rebel against God. Groups can refuse his loving overtures. But the consequences are tragic.

The relationship of the younger brother to the older is not an easy one. The younger can hardly urge his brother at all. After all, his own waywardness has created this unhappy situation. How can dialogue or witness do any good as long as the older brother feels injured and mistreated? All the younger son can do is accept humbly his father's unmerited favor, rejoice in it, and hope that his brother will someday get over his pique.

However tragic is the relationship between Jews and Christians today, believers in Jesus of Nazareth ought not revise their soteriology, their theology of salvation, on the basis of this brokenness and sin. Jesus is Lord and the author of our salvation. One believing section of Israel—along with all angry and unhappy sons in divine history—is inseparably related to the repentant younger son who lives in "the joy of his Lord." As Paul says so well in Romans 11, the only hope for changing Israel's mind is "through jealousy," a method only God would design.

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VARIED APPROACHES TO OTHER RELIGIONS

☆ **APOSTOLIC - Acts 10**

Peter and the Roman Centurion

☆ **ROMAN CATHOLIC - (1984)**

Developments and Tensions

☆ **CONCILIAR - (1984)**

Necessity for Jewish-Christian Dialogue

☆ **BAPTIST - (1984)**

The Problem of Proselytism

☆ **REFORMED - (1984)**

Christianity and Judaism

☆ **EVANGELICAL - (1981)**

A Paradigm Shift?

Joseph Bustillos
MT 533: Theology of Religious Encounter
January 18, 1985

✓
you survived

Essay Review: Peter and the Roman Centurion, Acts 10, or "Is
Friendly Dialogue Enough?" by Arthur F. Glasser

How does one critique one's professor's article and survive? *easily!*
With much tact and level-headed honesty. As an ex-Roman Catholic
I appreciated your use of documents from the Second Vatican
Council ("In the essentials Unity . . ."). Reading Pope Paul's
words regarding a need to go beyond "just friendly dialogue that
furthers human understanding" to a "gracious witness to Jesus
Christ" does my heart good. But that's not the purpose of this
review, or is it?

Dr. Glasser begins by securing his line on Revelation and
Scripture. Using the now famous quote of Calvin regarding the
Scriptures as a "pair of spectacles" to help us see clearly the
Revelation of God he counters with a quote from Berkouwer: "Every
religion is a reaction to divine revelation." This is where it
gets interesting. He then writes (quoting Freytag):

"Christianity is a human answer to the gospel." I'd love to
hear that coming from a professor in a Church Polity course. ✓
About as much a chance of that as the proverbial ice cube
But without that perspective it's difficult to approach the
Muslim or Jew without carrying an appearance of having arrived.))

This balance is maintained throughout the essay and the
point is made (as it was in Bavinck's essay) that there is this
commonality of religious "attraction", or thirst in mankind that
is experienced in all religions (including Christendom) that can
only be satisfied in the Person of Jesus Christ. A-men.

MISSIOLOGY, AN INTERNATIONAL
REVIEW.

No. 3, Vol. IV (1976)
pp. 259-266.

PETER AND THE ROMAN CENTURION

ACTS 10

OR **Is Friendly Dialogue Enough?**

Arthur F. Glasser

The presentation of the Gospel message is not an optional contribution for the Church. It is the duty incumbent on her by the command of the Lord Jesus, so that people can believe and be saved. This message is indeed necessary. It is unique. It cannot be replaced. It does not permit either indifference, syncretism or accommodation. It is a question of people's salvation . . . this great gift of God which is liberation from everything that oppresses man but which is above all liberation from sin and the Evil One, in the joy of knowing God (FIDES, December 20, 1975).

On the 10th anniversary of the conclusion of Vatican II, Pope Paul VI issued a significant and far-reaching missiological document on the subject: Evangelization in the Modern World. He called for "simple, clear and direct" preaching of the Gospel and described this task as "the essential mission of the Church." Not just friendly dialogue that furthers human understanding, but the sort of gracious witness to Jesus Christ that "proposes to their consciences the truth of the Gospel and salvation in Jesus Christ." The Pope is concerned that all men, regardless of religious allegiance, be given their inalienable right to hear of Jesus Christ and His Kingdom in the context of freedom and respect, unmarred by any form of coercion. In this he follows the apostolic pattern. It was Paul who wrote: "By the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God" (II Cor. 4:1).

Revelation and Dialogue

The Scriptures are emphatic in affirming that man on his own is unable to come to the knowledge of God. Such knowledge can only be obtained on God's initiative. Even as two human beings cannot know one another apart from a mutual self-disclosure of each to the other, so man does not come to the knowledge of God without God's prior revelation of himself followed by man's humble reception of that revelation. And the apostle Paul pointedly taught that such humble reception is extremely difficult for man because he is marked with a self-centered waywardness that causes him to suppress this revelation in unrighteousness (Rom. 1:18).

At best, man's knowledge of God, as perceived in the creation around him and in pondering the inner world of his own heart tends to be warped and distorted. Calvin speaks of man's needing the Scriptures to serve as a "pair of spectacles" removing the blur and sharpening the imagery.

It is for this reason that we feel it is so important to reflect on what the Bible says of religious encounter. There is a sense in which "every religion is a reaction to divine revelation" (Berkouwer 1955:162). One can even say that Christianity and Islam both reflect reaction and resistance and even defense against the revelation of God contained in Jesus Christ and in Holy Scripture. The Gospel reflects the perfection of God. But how limited is the understanding of the best of Christians: Paul saw the Gospel through a glass dimly, and his knowledge of its profundities was partial (I Cor. 13:9-12). And the long centuries of institutionalized Christianity have reflected distortion and imperfection; indeed, they even reflect the presence of the demonic.

Freytag helps us here. He emphatically contends that Christianity and the Gospel are not to be equated.

Christianity is a human answer to the gospel, to God's word in Jesus Christ. As a human, earthly answer Christianity is always subject to the rubric: "Not that I have already obtained" (Phil. 3:12). It is not what it is intended to be. It is the community of sinners standing in need of God's mercy . . . Christianity is both one religion among many and a unique phenomenon. It is a religion among many religions in so far as it comes under God's judgment. And it is a unique phenomenon in so far and as soon as it is a witness for the Word, the gospel, God's revelation in Christ, for the one revelation over against all religions; "a witness for" — that is to say that revelation is not at Christianity's disposal (1957:28).

Hence, how necessary that all religious systems, all religious experience, and all religious values be examined in the light of Jesus Christ and Scripture. This demands humility and honesty for only the poor in spirit possess the Kingdom and only the pure in heart see God (Matt. 5:3,8).

So then, we approach no religious system expecting "pure fantasy and fable and play" (Kuyper). Each religion has order, and an inner consistency; in its coherence it relates to all aspects of life; but, because it represents the human response to revelation, it reflects the corruption of mankind's *sensus divinitatis*. Some religions reflect this corruption and estrangement from truth more than others — e.g. Islam more than Christianity. This is not to deny either the Lordship of Christ or the uniqueness and finality of the revelation of Holy Scripture concerning Him. But humility becomes the Christian who would be loyal to Christ and the ultimate truth of his unique Gospel as he confronts the man of another religious allegiance.

The Grace We Discern

All which brings me to the familiar account of the encounter between the apostle Peter, a Messianic Jew, and a Roman centurion named Cornelius recorded in Acts 10 and 11. You all know the steps by which God brought Peter, the disciple of Jesus Christ, into the presence of a Gentile "who feared God with all his household, gave alms liberally to the people, and prayed constantly to God" (10:2). How impressed Peter must have been with this man! Incidentally, could you not use these same words to describe many a Jew or Muslim you have met on your spiritual pilgrimage? Vatican II stated:

Upon the Moslems . . . the Church looks with esteem. They adore one God, living and enduring, merciful and all-powerful, Maker of heaven and earth and Speaker to men. They strive to submit wholeheartedly even to His inscrutable decrees, just as did Abraham, with whom the Islamic faith is pleased to associate itself. Though they do not acknowledge Jesus as God, they revere Him as a prophet. They also honor Mary, His virgin mother; at times they call on her, too, with devotion. In addition they await the day of judgment when God will give each man his due after raising him up. Consequently, they prize the moral life, and give worship to God especially through prayer, almsgiving, and fasting (Rel. 3).

One should note that this statement does not conclude that Muslims do not need Jesus Christ. It merely gives generous

witness to the sincere respect with which all Muslims should be regarded. What they believe often reflects rays of that Truth which enlightens all men (John 1:9). Although some might argue that Cornelius was better informed about God than the average Muslim is today, the fact remains that when Peter met him, he had already been the recipient of a measure of that Truth. Is not Christ the great Seeker of men? Had he not been working in Cornelius' heart long before Peter came on the scene?

The Humanity We Share

Then a strange thing happened. When Peter entered Cornelius' house that good man prostrated himself before him (10:25). Far from receiving this expression of profound respect, Peter grasped his arm, raised him up, and spoke a memorable word the Church should never forget: "Stand up; I too am a man" (10:26). Here is the basis for true religious dialogue: the mutual acknowledgement of the commonality of human experience. Uppsala spoke of the "common humanity" which should characterize the Christian in his openness toward all men: "In dialogue we share our common humanity, its dignity and fallenness, and express our common concern for that humanity (Uppsala Report 1968:29).

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The Enlargement We Receive

But Peter was not only humble in spirit. He manifested an openness of mind that could not but have touched the seeking heart of Cornelius. He gave spontaneous witness to the fact that God was dealing with him through the encounter. He was receiving enlargement of understanding and deepening of his awareness of the grace of God displayed in His disclosure of His truth to men ("Truly, I perceive . . ." — 10:34). We should not misunderstand the nature of Peter's new discovery. He did not say that one religion is as good as another. And he certainly did not affirm that Cornelius' religious insights, personal devotion and acquired morality made him exempt from the need of salvation through Jesus Christ. What he recognized was the prior work of God in this man's heart, and that God honored him for his vibrant and vital response to what truth he knew, and for his success in sharing its blessings with those who were near and dear to him.

visit him
"godfearer"?

The story does not end with Peter rejoicing over his enlarged understanding of God as the great Seeker of men. Nor does it end with Cornelius being commended as an extraordinary Gentile, a very good man, flawless and exemplary in his religious activity. The fact remained that he was still in great spiritual need. God had already worked "a few minor miracles and changed a few basic heart attitudes" but Cornelius had yet to believe in Jesus Christ, be baptized and receive the Holy Spirit (LaSor 1972:161).

So then, there is a sense in which this account stands as one of the great biblical answers to the question posed by the religious Jew or Muslim, or the follower of any non-Christian faith: "My religion is good enough. Why do I need to accept Jesus Christ?" In response, the Christian must acknowledge the limitations of all religions and speak of Jesus Christ.

The Witness We Bear

At this point dialogue became proclamation. The climate of mutual acceptance and trust made this possible. In a forthright manner, Peter shared with Cornelius and his household the record of the mighty acts of God in and through Jesus Christ, culminating in his death, burial and resurrection. It was an honest witness given by a humble, though courageous man. Here is faithful dialogue — a truly adequate response to the missionary mandate Christ had given. No mere meeting of the faiths embodied in two friendly devotees. No! There has to be more than mutual sharing. The Gospel has to be shared *so as* to evoke faith. Jesus Christ is not to be shared just that he might be admired. His Gospel is to be believed; he seeks a verdict.

God willed that Cornelius be saved (11:14). This required the preaching of the Gospel. As we reflect on this narrative we cannot but note how much easier it would have been for God to have saved Cornelius and his household without involving angels, visions, and the witness of a believing Jew. But he didn't choose to work apart from this sequence. As Pope Paul VI stated so well: "The presentation of the Gospel message . . . is the duty incumbent on [the Church] . . . so that people can believe and be saved." This then is authentic dialogue.

The Norm We Possess

How did the story end? The last scene portrays the Holy Spirit confirming the Gospel to the hearts of Cornelius and his

household. They believed the message and received his inworking. Gone was the hunger that had earlier remained despite their devotion, prayers and alms-giving. They had met the Lord. His Gospel now became normative in testing all aspects of life. And his Lordship meant that from henceforth they would live under his direction and for his glory.

So then, there is a religious dialogue that exalts the "eternal Gospel" beyond the level of friendly discussion. It follows the apostolic pattern of reasoning, explaining, demonstrating, ~~proclaiming and persuading~~ (to list the action words of Acts 17:1-4). Its speech is "always seasoned with the salt of grace"; its objective is "to give every man a fitting answer"; and its theme is Jesus Christ (Col. 4:6, Weymouth). As Neill has well said:

Our task is to go on saying to the Muslim with infinite patience, "Sir, consider Jesus." We have no other message . . . It is not the case that the Muslim has seen Jesus of Nazareth and has rejected him; he has never seen him. And the veil of misunderstanding and prejudice is still over his face (1961:69).

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Joseph Bustillos
MT 533: Theology of Religious Encounter
February 15, 1985

excellent

Essay Review: Roman Catholic Approaches to Other Religions:
Developments and Tensions, by Paul F. Knitter.

Dr. Knitter's essay surveys the sad evolution of Catholic thought pertaining to Religious Pluralism. Being an ex-Catholic I understand the problem to involve something Knitter failed to mention, that is the Church's view of Ecclesiology. "Outside of the Church there is no salvation." Since the time of the late First and Second Centuries, as the Church was losing it's Apostles, and into the period of the Middle Ages, as the Roman Empire was disappearing into Feudalism, the Church has struggled with the question of where its authority lay and its confusion between the Divine Revelation of the Gospel and the human institution of the Church. This becomes a problem in terms of Religious Pluralism when new data pertaining to world religions successfully challenges previously held maxims. "Outside the Church there is no salvation." Any question can be threatening to the structure. And without clear lines of demarcation it's hard to tell when any change is a change for the worst.

A homey illustration of this can be seen in a story about a friend of mine that was raised in a conservative Christian home. She was told as a youngster about the Truth of the Gospel and that all non-Christians were unhappy people because of the lack of the Gospel in their lives. Needless to say during her years in college, when she was away from home, she ran into scores of non-Christians that seemed to be living full happy lives. Something was wrong. Because of this apparent contradiction and the connection she had believed in between the Gospel and the supposed "unhappiness" of the non-Christian populace, any change threatened her whole faith. Last time I saw her she was traveling through life as a critical agnostic. The point is that without the absolute centrality of the Gospel of Faith and the Revelation of Jesus Christ the Church is forced to maintain an "all or nothing at all" approach to its functions and ministry to the world.

Knitter's questions at the end of his essay may be helpful to a certain point, but he misses the mark by not recognizing the Church's authority problem in terms of not knowing when enough is enough (confusing itself with the Revelation of Christ). Knitter's questions leave us with a "Situational Theology."

Roman Catholic Approaches to Other Religions: Developments and Tensions

Paul F. Knitter

A missiological authority, well known and respected by readers of this journal, has recently indicated and predicted "radical changes" in Roman Catholic mission theology and in its attitude toward other religions:

... Roman Catholic mission theology has undergone more radical change in these fifteen years than in the previous century. And there is obviously a great deal more ferment to come in the last fifth of the twentieth century. What we see so far, in my judgment, is but a foretaste or the first fruits of a radical realignment of Catholic mission theology that by A.D. 2000 will be as far from our thinking today as our thinking today is from where Catholic mission theology was twenty years ago.¹

The following bird's-eye survey of five stages in the evolution of Catholic theology of religions will prove, I hope, how correct Gerald H. Anderson's assessment is. Given the limitations of a short article, I cannot do much more than describe the general content and the main representatives of each stage, with greater attention given to the newer, less-known developments. The intent of such a broad overview is to provide a sense of historical evolution that will enable us to understand and evaluate present developments and tensions.

Historical Background: From Exclusive to Inclusive Ecclesiocentrism

From the start, Christian theologians have had a hard time reconciling universality with particularity, that is, God's universal will to save with the particular mediation of that will in Jesus, word, and church. The early fathers held to a fairly common opinion that an authentic revelation and possibility of salvation were available to all peoples (based especially on the doctrine of "the seminal word"). This opinion soon lost currency. Especially under the imposing influence of Augustine and his anti-Pelagian polemic, and then in the heat of battle against the "paganism" of Islam, the prevalent attitude toward other religions from the fifth century through the Middle Ages (even for Aquinas) was that "outside the church there is no salvation."² The Council of Florence (1442) officially declared that "no one, whatever almsgiving he has practiced, even if he has shed blood for the name of Christ, can be saved, unless he has remained in the bosom and unity of the Catholic Church."³

The Council of Trent signaled a "radical change" in the exclusive ecclesiocentrism of the Middle Ages. Especially in light of the newly discovered peoples who had never heard of Christ, the council allowed that "baptism of desire" could admit into the church anyone who lived a moral life but could not receive baptism of water.⁴ This more optimistic attitude toward the "pagans" characterized, for the most part, Roman Catholic attitudes from

the sixteenth to the twentieth centuries. What took place was a significant shift in Catholic theology from an *exclusive* to an *inclusive* understanding of the church as the sole channel of grace. In other words, Catholic belief moved from holding "outside the church no salvation" to "without the church no salvation." During the first half of the twentieth century, Catholic theologians came up with ingenious concepts to include within the church any trace of salvation outside it: saved non-Christians belonged to the "soul" of the church; they were "attached," "linked," "related" to the church; they were members "imperfectly," "tendentially," "potentially."⁵

Historians often forget that this positive shift in Catholic attitudes toward "pagans" did not include a more positive attitude toward pagan religions. Very few theologians ventured the assertion that universally available grace might be available through the religions. The experience of God's grace, always an ecclesial affair for Catholics, was evidently a private affair for pagans.⁶

Constitutive Christocentrism: Christ in the Religions (Vatican II and Karl Rahner)

Vatican Council II continued the inclusive ecclesiocentrism of the previous period. While the council fathers reaffirmed that the church is necessary for salvation, they also, as it were, extended the universal possibility of salvation—even atheists could be saved.⁷ Yet the council, as is well known, took a definitely new turn when, for the first time in the history of official church statements, it praised individual world religions for the way they reflect "that Truth which enlightens every person."⁸ The majority of Catholic thinkers interpret the conciliar statements to affirm, implicitly but clearly, that the religions are ways of salvation. These theologians endorse the theology of religions elaborated by Karl Rahner, whose thought so strongly influenced the council's deliberations. In Rahner, and in his endorsers, we see another radical change in Catholic theology of religions.

The main ingredients in Rahner's optimistic assessment of other religions are well known. They are two: *God's universal salvific will* (grounding what Rahner terms a "salvific optimism" for all humanity) and *humanity's essentially social nature*. Combining the two ingredients: if God wills to grant grace to every person, this grace must take on a sociohistorical "body" in order to be really available; and among the most likely mediating bodies for grace are the religions. The religions therefore are or can be "grace-filled" ways of salvation and are "positively included in God's plan of salvation."⁹ What enables Rahner to draw this conclusion is his subtle but significant shift from ecclesiocentrism to Christocentrism.

This shift is embodied in Rahner's much discussed model of anonymous Christianity (which, as his critics often forget, he intended only for Christian consumption, not for proclamation to outsiders). The model's first intent is to remind Christians that God's saving presence "is greater than man and the Church"; grace can, as it were, float free of the visible church and incarnate itself in other words and sacraments. But for Rahner, if grace is not bound to the church, it is bound to Christ. Jesus of Nazareth is the constitutive cause of all salvation. As the full and final manifestation of God's saving presence in history, he is both the cause (final

Paul F. Knitter is Professor of Theology at Xavier University, Cincinnati. He is the author of *Towards a Protestant Theology of Religions* (1974) and numerous journal articles on religious pluralism. His recent survey and evaluation of Christian attitudes toward other religions will be published by Orbis Books.

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cause) and the goal of every experience of God. Grace, therefore, is always Christ's, always oriented toward Christ and toward Christ's continued embodiment in the church. (In this sense, Rahner continues to claim the "necessity" of the church.) In the final analysis, then, the religions are incomplete without Christ; they must be fulfilled in him and his church; they are a *praeparatio evangelica*, a preparation for the gospel. The missionary mandate remains intact and is reinforced.¹⁰

Vatican II's statements on other religions, as interpreted by Rahner, embody the mainline view of Roman Catholic theologians, even though they may not expressly use the model of anonymous Christianity. Edward Schillebeeckx, Pietro Rossano, Avery Dulles, Richard McBrien, even Pierre Teilhard de Chardin affirm the universality of Christ and his grace and the religions as mediators of that grace.¹¹ Because these theologians continue to hold to Christ as the one Savior and constitutive cause of salvation, they view the religions as already partially containing Christ's grace, but as incomplete until fully incorporated into Christ and his church.

Normative Christocentrism: Christ above the Religions (A New Direction)

Although most contemporary Roman Catholic theologians readily accept the basics of the mainline approach to other religions, many are uneasy with the way it seems to judge religions before really listening to them, especially by predefining them as anonymous Christians. This uneasiness has given rise to another realignment in Catholic attitudes toward religions; there is a shift beyond Vatican II and Rahner, toward a clearer recognition of the independent value and enduring mission of other faiths. The underlying, often implicit, theological foundation for this shift is a new understanding of Christ's (and the church's) salvific role.

Hans Küng speaks for many in his criticism of the anonymous-Christianity model. For Küng, this theory is but a "theological fabrication," intended to save the "infallible formula" of outside-the-church-no-salvation. To view other believers as Christians without a name is an offense to them and an obstacle to Christians' ability genuinely to listen to what these others have to say. Küng urges Christians to admit, honestly, that the church is not necessary for salvation. With H. R. Schlette he describes the religions as the "ordinary," or common, way to salvation, while Christianity makes up the "extraordinary," or special, way.¹²

Other Roman Catholic theologians complement Küng's views when they suggest that perhaps it is not God's will that all peoples enter the Christian fold; perhaps "religious pluralism is the will of God for humanity." This implies that the other religions and Christianity may be parallel paths to salvation, with any final convergence reserved for the eschaton.¹³ In this view, the accepted image of the church as the "Sacrament of salvation" means that the primary mission of the church is not to bring redemption but "epiphany," not to win conversions to the church as the necessary means of salvation but to help build the broader kingdom of God as it takes shape within history. Furthering the kingdom might well mean making Buddhists better Buddhists.¹⁴

Another aspect of this new shift among Catholic theologians is seen in their approach to dialogue. They suggest that Christians should speak with other believers not only to reveal points of agreement or conflict, not only to understand more profoundly what they (Christians) already have in Christ, but also to discover genuinely new pieces of the mosaic of God's universal revelation.¹⁵ Such a view implies that God has more to say than what was said in the Christian word.

As Peter Schineller has pointed out, implicit in this new atti-

tude toward other religions is a move away from understanding Christ as "the constitutive, unique . . . mediator of salvation for all mankind." Just as Rahner no longer tied universal saving grace to the church, many Roman Catholic theologians no longer tie it to Christ. Therefore they feel no pressing need to identify other believers as anonymous Christians or to usher them into the church. Yet despite this Christological shift and its intent to let the religions stand on their own, all the theologians exploring this new direction continue to affirm Jesus Christ as God's normative revelation. Jesus and the gospel remain the "superior or ideal type, which can function to measure, correct, and judge others by its own standards."¹⁶

So Küng, after denouncing common Christian attitudes toward other believers as "arrogant domination . . . [and] absolutism," himself proclaims Christ as "ultimately decisive [and] definitive" and as providing the "critical catalyst" without which the religions cannot really adjust to the modern world. For Küng, other believers may not be anonymous but they are potential Christians.¹⁷ Other theologians (H. R. Schlette, Bernard Lonergan,

"God has more to say than what was said in the Christian word."

William Thompson, and more recently Walbert Buhlmann and Arnulf Camps), who call for a greater recognition of the independent validity of other faiths, continue to affirm Jesus Christ as bearing an "absolute quality," as "God's definitive manifestation," as "unsurpassable."¹⁸ This recognition of the independent validity of other religions, together with the continued affirmation of Christ/Christianity's normativeness, makes up what might be called a growing common opinion among Catholic theologians.

Dialogical Theocentrism: Many Religions/ Partners in God (A Minority View)

Another group of Catholic thinkers, still a minority, detect a tension, even a contradiction, between the previous view's more positive approach to other faiths and its insistence on the normativeness of Christ. In trying to resolve this tension, these minority theologians epitomize the "great deal more ferment" that Gerald H. Anderson predicted in Catholic mission theology. These theologians, all of whom are veterans in the actual arena of inter-religious dialogue, try to show how Christians can encounter other believers with a clear affirmation of Christ's universal salvific role without having to claim his normativeness and finality. In somewhat greater detail, let us consider three examples of this new ferment.

1. Raimundo Panikkar is one of the most learned and experienced advocates of a revised understanding of Christ and religions. Within the "ecumenical ecumenism" that he has promoted over the past two and a half decades, he has revised his earlier view that Christianity is "the end and plenitude of every religion." In the completely revised 1981 edition of his *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism* and in statements since the early 1970s, he affirms that no religion can enter the dialogue with claims of final or absolute normativeness.¹⁹ He now advocates "an authentically universal Christology," which makes use of traditional Logos Christology and

presses the distinction between the Christ (Logos) and the historical Jesus. Christ/Logos is the universal bond between humanity/world and God—the self-communicating, unifying outreach of the Ultimate. As to the relation between Christ and Jesus, Panikkar states succinctly: "Christ the Savior is . . . not to be restricted to the merely historical figure of Jesus of Nazareth. . . . Though a Christian believes that 'Jesus is the Christ' . . . this sentence is not identical to 'the Christ is Jesus' . . ." From his own Christian and interreligious experience, Panikkar holds that Christians can allow for other historical names and manifestations of the Christ, without lessening their personal commitment to Jesus as the Christ or to the urgency of making him known to all.²⁰ With such an approach, Christian mission consists both in witnessing and in being witnessed to.

2. Another clear call for revisions in traditional views of Christ and other religions is sounded by *Catholic theologians engaged in the dialogue with Judaism*: Gregory Baum, Monika Hellwig, John Pawlikowski, Rosemary Ruether. While their particular perspectives differ, they are unanimous in insisting that insofar as Christian understanding of Christ has led to a "supersessionist," subordinating approach to Judaism, "our traditional Christology is severely inadequate" and must be "significantly rethought."²¹ In different ways, all of them appeal to Christians to modify their understanding of Christ as the final Messiah, that is, as he who has brought about the final, normative realization of the kingdom.

Baum argues that until the last days are upon us, all absolute, final assertions about Christ should be avoided.²² Hellwig points out that all Christian talk about Christ is religious, existential language that should not be turned into absolute, ontological claims for all peoples and times.²³ Ruether proposes that the death and resurrection of Jesus be seen as a salvific paradigm of hope and transforming praxis that exists alongside other salvific paradigms.²⁴ Pawlikowski wants to safeguard the uniqueness of the Christ-event, which, he feels, Judaism would do well to recognize; but he also admits the uniqueness of Judaism, which must complement and complete Christianity.²⁵ Again, all of these theologians hold that a relativizing of Jesus' finality does not lessen his universal relevance. In their minds, Christian commitment to and witness of Jesus remain robust.

3. Some of the boldest proposals for a revision of approaches to other religions are sounded by *Third World mission theologians* such as Ignace Puthiadam, Henri Maurier, and Aloysius Pieris. All three give painful witness to how traditional Christian claims of having a "normative, complete, definitive" revelation in Christ have made Christian dialogue with other faiths an encounter "between the cat and the mouse."²⁶ Pieris reduces all given Christian approaches to other faiths to two models: either the "Christ-against-religion" model (neo-orthodox, evangelical, as well as Latin American liberation theologies) or the "Christ-of-religions" model (Catholicism's anonymous-Christian theory as well as India's and the World Council of Churches' cosmic Christology). Both approaches conceal a "crypto-colonialist theology of religions . . . that keeps our revolutionary rhetoric from resonating in the hearts of the Third World non-Christian majorities."²⁷ All three theologians, therefore, suggest that Christians, under the pressure of a more effective witness to other believers, examine how they have falsely absolutized Christ.

Puthiadam and Maurier propose a model for mission and dialogue that recognizes unique, universally meaningful truth in each religion (and each "savior"); yet each "unique" religion or revealer is not excluded or relativized by the other, but essentially related to the other. All religions, in their real differences and otherness, are related to each other as a "coincidence of opposites"; they are in need of each other in order to carry on, together, their common

pilgrimage toward the Divine Mystery, the "Source and Goal" that animates them all. The primary goal of mission, then, is not conversion (though that is not excluded), but mutual witnessing.²⁸

Pieris the basis and framework for Christian mission and religious encounter should not be Christology (presupposing Christ to be either against or already within other religions) or theology (exploring whether/how other religions recognize God). Rather, Christian approaches to other faiths should be grounded in soteriology, in the "ineffable mystery of salvation," which for Pieris is the divine urge and impulse to liberate and generate "a new humanity." All religions, including those of the East, share in and contribute to this liberating mystery, which is the only real "absolute" in religious encounter. Mission and dialogue should be based on collaboration with other believers in this mystery. Theological clarifications about the uniqueness of Jesus can follow.²⁹

This most recent shift in Roman Catholic theology of religions incorporates a clearly theocentric perspective. It is both *distant from* and yet *continuous with* the ecclesiocentrism and Christocentrism of earlier Catholic views. While continuing to affirm Jesus as a savior for all peoples of all times, together with the church as the community by which Jesus' presence and message is embodied through time, these Third World theologians see all religions as partners in a salvific dialogue in which not the church or Jesus, but God, the "mystery of salvation", is the final ground and goal and norm.

Conclusion:

In tracing the radical changes throughout the history of Catholic attitudes toward other religions, one detects a certain evolution

from ecclesiocentrism to Christocentrism and, most recently, to theocentrism. The central question for Catholics and all Christians is whether this evolution has been toward more abundant life or, at any point in its unfolding, it has arrived at dead ends. This question applies especially to the new, theocentric approach. At stake is the integrity of the gospel, the quality of Christian com-

"One detects a certain evolution from ecclesiocentrism to Christocentrism and, most recently, to theocentrism."

mitment, and the vitality of Christian mission. To discern whether the evolution we have studied is life-giving, Catholic theologies of religions need to be tested against three criteria: Do they enable Christians to hear more adequately the witness of Scripture? Do they lead the Christian faithful to a deeper commitment to Christ and the gospel? And especially, do they inspire Christians to carry out more effectively their essential mission of advancing God's kingdom by witnessing to God's Christ? To carry out this task of discernment, Catholic theologians need support and criticism from their brothers and sisters in other churches. The intent of this study is to promote that kind of inner-Christian dialogue.

Notes

1. Gerald H. Anderson, in *Christ's Lordship and Religious Pluralism*, ed. Gerald H. Anderson and Thomas F. Stransky (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1981), p. 110.
2. Augustine, *Enchiridion*, 107. Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II, II, q. 2, art. 5, ad 1; III, q. 61, art. 1; II, q. 2, art. 7.
3. H. Denzinger, *Enchiridion Symbolorum Definitionum et Declarationum*, sects. ed. 33 by A. Schönmetzer (Freiburg i. Br.: Herder, 1965), sect. 1351.
4. *Ibid.*, 1524, 1542.
5. Maurice Esmayan, *The Theology of Salvation* (Boston: St. Paul Editions, 1960), pp. 167-81.
6. Notable exceptions to this disregard of the possible value of other religions were Nicholas of Cusa (1464), Matteo Ricci (1610), Robert de Nobili (1656), and more recently, Otto Karrer in his *Religions of Mankind* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1936).
7. *Lumen Gentium*, 14, 16; *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 3.
8. *Nostra Aetate*, 2.
9. Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, 14 vols. (New York: Crossroad, 1964), vol. 5, pp. 121-30; *Foundations of Christian Faith* (New York: Crossroad, 1978), pp. 315-16, 40-41.
10. Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, vol. 5, pp. 118, 122, 131-34; vol. 6, pp. 390-95; vol. 12, pp. 161-78.
11. Schillebeeckx, "The Church and Mankind," *Concilium*, 1 (1965); pp. 36, 43-47; Rossano, "Christ's Lordship and Religious Pluralism in Roman Catholic Perspective," in *Christ's Lordship*, ed. Anderson and Stransky, pp. 96-110; Dulles, *Models of Revelation* (New York: Doubleday, 1983), pp. 189-92; McBrien, *Catholicism* (Oak Grove, Minn.: Winston Press, 1981), pp. 269-71, 290; Ursula King, "Religion and the Future: Teilhard de Chardin's Analysis of Religion as a Contribution to Inter-Religious Dialogue," *Religious Studies* 7 (1971): 307-23.
12. Küng, *On Being a Christian* (New York: Doubleday, 1976), pp. 97-98; "The World Religions in God's Plan of Salvation," in *Christian Revelation and World Religions*, ed. Joseph Neuner (London: Burns & Oates, 1967), pp. 31-37, 51-53; H. R. Schlette, *Towards a Theology of Religions* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1965), pp. 80-81.
13. Gregory Baum, "Christianity and Other Religions," *Cross Currents* 16 (1966): 461; Piet Schoonenberg, "The Church and Non-Christian Religions," in *The Evolving Church*, ed. D. Flanagan (Staten Island, N.Y.: Alba House, 1966), pp. 97-99; Eugene Hillman, *The Wider Ecumenism* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1968), pp. 60-61; Ignace Puthiadam, "Christian Faith and Life in a World of Religious Pluralism," *Concilium*, 135 (1980): 105-6.
14. Schlette, *Towards a Theology of Religions*, pp. 83-93; Hillman, *The Wider Ecumenism*, pp. 81-158; Roger Haight, "Mission: The Symbol for Understanding the Church Today," *Theological Studies*, 37 (1976): 620-48.
15. Schoonenberg, *The Church and Non-Christian Religions*, pp. 100-107; Küng, *On Being a Christian*, pp. 112-16.
16. J. Peter Schineller, "Christ and the Church: A Spectrum of Views," *Theological Studies* 37 (1976): 555-57.
17. Küng, *On Being a Christian*, pp. 106-15, 123-24; "The World Religions," pp. 57-66.
18. Schlette, *Towards a Theology of Religions*, pp. 93-96; Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (New York: Seabury Press, 1972), pp. 112-13, 119; Bühlmann, *The Chosen People* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1983), pp. 207, 219-22; Camps, *Partners in Dialogue: Christianity and Other World Religions* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books 1983), pp. 33-34, 48, 54, 113, 155; Thompson, "The Risen Christ, Transcultural Consciousness and the Encounter of the World Religions," *Theological Studies* 37 (1976): 381-409.

19. Panikkar, *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books 1973), p. 55; *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1981), pp. 75-96; "The Category of Growth in Comparative Religions," *Harvard Theological Review* 66 (1973): 113-40; "Christianity and World Religions," in *Christianity* (Patiala, India: Punjab Univ., 1969), pp. 78-127.
 20. Panikkar, *Salvation in Christ* (Santa Barbara, Calif.: privately published, 1972), pp. 51-62, 71-72; *The Trinity*, pp. 53-54; *The Unknown Christ*, pp. 8-9, 14, 27, 48.
 21. John Pawlikowski, *Christ in the Light of the Christian-Jewish Dialogue* (New York: Paulist Press, 1982), p. 7.
 22. Baum, "Introduction" to R. Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide: The Theological Roots of Anti-Semitism* (New York: Seabury Press, 1974).
 23. Hellwig, "Christian Theology and the Covenant of Israel," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 7 (1970): 49.
 24. Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide*, pp. 249, 256; *To Change the World: Christology and Cultural Change* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Co., 1981), pp. 42-43.
 25. Pawlikowski, *Christ in the Light*, pp. 113-18, 121-25, 149.
 26. Puthiadam, "Christian Faith and Life," pp. 103-5, 110-11; Maurier, "The Christian Theology of the Non-Christian Religions," *Lumen Vitae* 21 (1976): 60.
 27. Pieris, "The Place of Non-Christian Religions and Cultures in the Evolution of Third World Theology," in *Irruption of the Third World: Challenge to Theology*, ed. Virginia Fabella and Sergio Torres (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books 1983), pp. 114-22; "Speaking of the Son of God in Non-Christian Cultures, e.g. in Asia," *Concilium* 153 (1982): 66-67.
 28. Puthiadam, "Christian Faith and Life," pp. 107-11; Maurier, "The Christian Theology," pp. 71-74.
 29. Pieris, "The Place," pp. 133-34; "Speaking," pp. 67-68.
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SALVATION: A MATTER OF PERSONAL CHOICE

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SALVATION is a key concept within Christianity, as it is indeed within all the various religions. Salvation in some form or other is what people seek in and through the practice of religion. Yet, pervasive as the concept is in religious literature and in the thoughts of men and women everywhere, there does not seem to be much agreement even among Christians as to what in the concrete salvation really means. As Gustavo Gutierrez remarks in his *Theology of Liberation*, "one of the great deficiencies of contemporary theology is the absence of a profound and lucid reflection on the theme of salvation."¹ Gutierrez himself then tries to remedy this situation by linking the biblical theme of salvation with the striving of oppressed peoples throughout the world for political, economic, and social development—in a word, for growth in human personhood. What remains ambiguous in his presentation, however, is the connection between this new "incarnational" approach to salvation and traditional Christian eschatology—above all, the traditional concepts of heaven and hell as the final destiny of every human being. Other theologians have been alert to this deficiency. The men and women, for example, gathered in 1975 at the Hartford Seminary Foundation in Connecticut condemned the following thesis: "To realize one's potential and to be true to oneself is the whole meaning of salvation."²

In all likelihood, this condemnation was not aimed directly at Gutierrez or any other advocate of liberation theology as such, but rather at an implicit orientation in their thinking which might have negative consequences for traditional Christian belief. Yet, despite its obvious shortcomings, liberation theology has awakened contemporary Christians to the need for a fresh perspective on many points of doctrine which might otherwise be falling into desuetude for lack of attention. Chief among these is surely the doctrine of the "last things." As John Shea points out, there is not much enthusiasm today for the Church's teaching on eschatology, even among fervent, churchgoing Roman Catholics: "The religious man does not pine after eternity but labors to build the earth. He leaves the afterlife to afterwards. So caught up in the agony and bliss of this world he is beyond the egocentric worries of a future reward and punishment."³ But, as Shea also points out, "heaven and hell

¹ G. Gutierrez, *Theology of Liberation*, tr. C. Inda and J. Eagleson (Maryknoll, N.Y., 1973) p. 149.

² *Time*, Feb. 10, 1975, p. 149.

³ J. Shea, *What a Modern Catholic Believes about Heaven and Hell* (Chicago, 1972) p. 9.

touch upon sober truths which the Catholic, although he may not want to look at them, can hardly avoid."⁴ Their intimate connection with the deeper question of salvation and the ultimate meaning of human life as such keeps the conscientious Catholic from dismissing them as outdated mythology, derived from the three-storey universe of the ancient world.

Accordingly, I will offer in these pages a new approach to the doctrine of the "last things," with special focus on the concepts of heaven and hell. My purpose will not be to vindicate traditional Christian eschatology vis-à-vis contemporary liberation theology (or vice versa), but rather to present an independent understanding of heaven and hell which might for different reasons appeal to partisans of both camps: both to the "conservative," whose belief in the reality of heaven and hell is absolutely unshakable, and to the "liberal," who is equally convinced that salvation is meaningless apart from human development in this life, growth in personal freedom, etc. A word of caution, however, must be spoken in advance. Since no one in this life can verify from personal experience what it means to be in heaven or hell, this presentation will inevitably be somewhat speculative. But, as the scriptural images of heaven and hell make clear in their own way, mythology plays an important role in human life. That is, whether one's imaginative picture of heaven or hell is consistent in every detail is ultimately less important than the influence which it has, or fails to have, on one's daily life. What I will be striving for in this article, therefore, is an understanding of heaven and hell which may challenge Christians of all persuasions to re-examine their cherished beliefs about the meaning of life and the final destiny of the human person.

RECENT THEOLOGICAL OPINION

The first step in this presentation will be to review briefly recent theological opinion on heaven and hell. I have already taken note of Shea's work *What a Modern Catholic Believes about Heaven and Hell* and Gutierrez' *Theology of Liberation*. Both stress the importance of eschatology for the true understanding of Christian existence, but both likewise feel that in its traditional form the doctrine of the "last things" is virtually an anachronism. Gutierrez, for example, suggests that eschatology in the classical sense was never more than an appendix to the central themes of creation and redemption.⁵ The new eschatology or theology of hope, however, with its emphasis on realization of the eschatological promises even now in the economic and political order, is, says Gutierrez, "not just one more element of Christianity, but the very key to understanding the Christian faith."⁶ In a similar vein, John

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

⁵ Gutierrez, *op. cit.*, p. 162.

⁶ *Ibid.*

Macquarrie first takes note of the strongly eschatological character of New Testament studies since the ground-breaking research of Johannes Weiss and Albert Schweitzer, but then adds the caution that traditional concepts like heaven, hell, judgment, eternal life, etc., will have to be broadly reinterpreted in order to make sense to modern man.⁷

Likewise, Gregory Baum, Gordon Kaufman, and Juan Luis Segundo underscore the importance of a new, more existential interpretation of the traditional concepts of heaven and hell. Baum, for example, says: "Heaven and hell together constitute Christ's message, declaring the new life to which men are summoned and revealing the crucial importance of some of the decisions that men must make in their history. . . . The message of heaven and hell, then, is not information about another world but saving truth producing a new consciousness in man and affecting his personal history."⁸ Kaufman comments: "Eschatological doctrine, far from being superfluous and dispensable speculation, deals with the very foundation of Christian faith."⁹ Yet he also believes that the traditional concepts of the Last Judgment, heaven, and hell should not be interpreted as "providing secret gnosis of future events or circumstances.

All should be seen as expressions in mythological form of the confidence that God will ultimately succeed in realizing his purposes for history and for mankind."¹⁰ Finally, Segundo emphasizes the "infantile" character of the scriptural images of heaven and hell, but then adds: "We call these images 'infantile' because they are the first stage of a deeper and richer revelation. They are not false, therefore. But one could not overstress the inauthenticity and the problems they are capable of introducing into an adult Christian life, if they do not undergo transformation as man's overall life grows and matures."¹¹

All the above-mentioned authors agree, then, that the basic concepts of heaven and hell are central to the Christian tradition, but they also agree that the traditional images of heaven and hell as presented in the Bible are no longer fully credible to many believing Christians, hence that these same images have effectively ceased to motivate the faithful to lead upright lives as in the past. How, then, is one to reinterpret the notions of heaven and hell so that they will function as in the past, namely, as an effective stimulus to good behavior and a deterrent from recognized evil?

⁷ J. Macquarrie, *Principles of Christian Theology* (New York, 1966) pp. 313-19.

⁸ G. Baum, *Man Becoming* (New York, 1970) p. 100.

⁹ G. D. Kaufman, *Systematic Theology: A Historicist Perspective* (New York, 1968) p. 316.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 471.

¹¹ J. L. Segundo, S.J., *Grace and the Human Condition*, tr. J. Drury (Maryknoll, N.Y., 1973) p. 162.

THE SOURCES

Perhaps a beginning might be made by taking a closer look at the sources, namely, the Hebrew and Christian Bible and some of the Church documents in which the traditional teaching on heaven and hell was set forth. In the Hebrew Bible Sheol, the abode of the dead, was the ultimate destination of both the good and the wicked.¹² The ancient Israelites, therefore, did not distinguish between heaven and hell as separate places where, respectively, bliss or torment awaited one. Quite the contrary, as Roland Murphy comments, Sheol "meant almost non-existence."¹³ That is, the deceased were thought to be asleep; they were not awake enough to experience sharp pain or deep joy.¹⁴ Admittedly, in later Jewish apocalyptic, above all in the Book of Enoch, the dead were thought to survive as conscious individuals who were rewarded or punished for their deeds while in this life; hence different compartments or "hollow places" in Sheol were reserved for the good and the wicked.¹⁵ But, as H. H. Rowley comments, Jewish apocalyptic was politically as well as religiously inspired.¹⁶ It served, in other words, as a vigorous protest against the intolerable political, economic, and social conditions to which the Jewish people were subjected, beginning in the last two centuries before Christ.¹⁷ Hence, from our present perspective it is difficult to say to what extent these vivid images of divine retribution in the afterlife represent a genuine break-through or striking new insight for the Jewish people into God's providential activity in history (and beyond it),¹⁸ and to what extent the same images, above all in their more vindictive overtones, simply reflect the deeply-felt need of a persecuted people to be avenged on their enemies.

Turning now to the Christian Bible, we note how Paul and the Evangelists likewise use apocalyptic imagery to protest against their current situation of oppression and injustice. Paul, for example, in First Thessalonians encourages the Christians to persevere under persecution,

¹² Cf., e.g., D. S. Russell, *The Method and Message of Jewish Apocalyptic* (Philadelphia, 1964), p. 355; also *Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. X. Leon-Dufour, S.J., tr. P. J. Cahill (New York, 1967) p. 205.

¹³ R. E. Murphy, O.Carm., "Introduction to Wisdom Literature" (28:37), *Jerome Biblical Commentary*, eds. R. Brown, S.S., J. Fitzmyer, S.J., and R. Murphy, O.Carm. (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1968).

¹⁴ Cf., e.g., Is 14:9; Qoh 9:5, 10; Ps 88:10 ff.

¹⁵ Cf. 1 Enoch 21-22: *The Book of Enoch*, tr. R. H. Charles (London, 1960).

¹⁶ H. H. Rowley, *The Relevance of Apocalyptic* (2nd ed.; London, 1947) pp. 16-17.

¹⁷ Cf. B. Prusak, "Heaven and Hell: Eschatological Symbols of Existential Protest," *Cross Currents* 24 (1975) 477; "It was a heartfelt protest against oppression and the existential need for liberation from anxiety and meaninglessness which gave rise to the first statement in Judaism of the idea of retribution after death."

¹⁸ Cf. on this point Russell, *op. cit.*, pp. 355-57, 366-69.

since the Lord Jesus at his second coming "will repay with injury those who are injuring you, and reward you, who are suffering now" (1 Th 1:6-7). Similarly, the Gospel of Matthew quite possibly pronounces its long list of "woes" against the Scribes and Pharisees (Mt 23:13-36) because the latter represent the "enemy," i.e., those who refuse to accept Christ and who persecute those who do accept him. To quote Bernard Prusak, "the Christians in their time of powerlessness adopted the technique which apocalyptic pharisaism had previously employed against its oppressors. They left revenge to God."¹⁹

Naturally, one cannot dismiss all apocalyptic imagery from the Christian Bible, any more than from the Hebrew Bible, on the grounds that it expresses simply the anguished protest of an oppressed people against their more powerful enemies; for belief in personal immortality would seem to be for Christians a constitutive part of the good news of salvation. Yet reflections such as these should make one cautious in attributing directly to Jesus some of the more obviously vindictive statements in the Gospels about the fires of hell, the pains of the damned, etc. For example, in the same context in which he pronounces his "woes" upon the rich and powerful of this world, the Jesus of Luke's Gospel urges his hearers: "Be compassionate as your Father is compassionate. Do not judge and you will not be judged yourselves; do not condemn and you will not be condemned yourselves; grant pardon and you will be pardoned" (Lk 6:36-37). Furthermore, as Jürgen Moltmann points out, the scandal of Jesus' message to the Zealots and their sympathizers was that, while he vigorously denounced social injustice at every opportunity, "he did not call upon the poor to revenge themselves upon their exploiters nor the oppressed to oppress their oppressors."²⁰ For all these reasons, then, it would seem better to suspend judgment upon the literal truth and/or total accuracy of the various scriptural images of heaven and hell. They embody a profound truth about the destiny of man which is central to the Judeo-Christian message, but the images themselves have strong mythological overtones.²¹

¹⁹ Prusak, *art. cit.*, p. 482; cf. also R. H. Charles, *Eschatology: The Doctrine of a Future Life in Israel, Judaism, and Christianity* (New York, 1963) pp. 367-68, 399-400. Charles regards Christian belief in eternal damnation for the wicked as an unfortunate legacy of late Judaism which should be replaced by the true Christian perspective, namely, that even the damned, after a period of punishment for their sins, are to be admitted to the bliss of heaven. For my own comments on this point, see the latter part of this article.

²⁰ J. Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, tr. R. Wilson and J. Bowden (New York, 1974) p. 141.

²¹ Still another influence upon the Hebrew and Christian Bible in the matter of the apocalyptic imagery is Greek mythology. For a discussion of this theme, cf. T. F. Glasson, *Greek Influence in Jewish Eschatology* (London, 1961); also Russell, *op. cit.*, pp. 385-90.

Still further reason for caution is given when one examines the official position of the Church's magisterium on heaven and hell. First of all, as the editors of *The Teaching of the Catholic Church* remark, "the position of Christ and his Church in eschatology has not always been proclaimed with the same emphasis at all times and in every decree. Almost always the Church's decrees are aimed at heresies which arise and these mostly concern the last things as they affect individuals."²² There is, accordingly, an initial difficulty in settling on some given text as representative of the Church's official position in the matter. But even if one collates the principal documents dealing with eschatology, there is, secondly, the added difficulty that the description of heaven and hell therein contained is much more abstract (and therefore far less pictorial) than the language of Scripture. Hence it would seem problematic whether or not the scriptural images of heaven and hell form an essential part of the teaching of the Church on the last things.

To be specific, the teaching of the Catholic Church on heaven and hell seems to be concentrated in four major documents: the Profession of Faith of the Eleventh Council of Toledo in 675 (*DS* 540 [287]), the Chapter on Catholic Faith at the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 (*DS* 801 [429]), the Constitution *Benedictus Deus* of Pope Benedict XII in 1336 (*DS* 1000-1002 [530-31]), and the Decree for the Greeks at the Council of Florence in 1439 (*DS* 1304-6 [693]). A summary of the teaching there set forth would run as follows. The blessed in heaven enjoy the beatific vision, i.e., direct contemplation of the divine essence, whereas the damned suffer the torments of hell. The blessed cannot lose heaven any more than the damned can escape from hell. Heaven and hell, moreover, are of eternal duration. No mention is made, however, of the external circumstances of heaven apart from the direct vision of God; nor are the pains of the damned specified except with the brief remark in the Decree for the Greeks that the damned will be punished in separate ways: "poenis tamen disparibus puniendas" (*DS* 1306 [693]). May one then conclude that the scriptural images of heaven and hell (e.g., of heaven as a banquet [Is 25:6; Mt 8:11] and of hell as a blazing furnace [Mt 13:42]) are not in themselves constitutive parts of Christian belief in the reality of heaven and hell, hence that other images and symbols might profitably be employed to visualize the afterlife, provided that the fundamentals of Christian belief about heaven and hell, as noted above, are kept intact?²³

²² *The Teaching of the Catholic Church*, eds. J. Neuner, S.J., H. Roos, S.J., and K. Rahner, S.J., tr. G. Stevens (Staten Island, N.Y., 1967) p. 413.

²³ For still other attempts to reconceive the afterlife in more contemporary language, cf. R. W. Gleason, S.J., *The World to Come* (New York, 1958); also X. Leon-Dufour, S.J.,

A FRESH CONCEPTUALIZATION

Presuming an affirmative answer to this question, I will now proceed to my own conceptualization of heaven and hell. It will be quite consciously an exercise in theological imagination, but not pure fancy. I will try, in other words, to ground my reflections within the framework provided by the constant teaching of the Church. The Baltimore Catechism, for example, in response to the question "What must I do to gain the happiness of heaven," states: "To gain the happiness of heaven we must know, love, and serve God in this world."²⁴ What remains ambiguous in this otherwise straightforward response is the connection between the knowledge, love, and service of God in this life and man's happiness in the next. Are we, for example, to be rewarded for our life of virtue now by something totally different in the next life? Or is the knowledge, love, and service of God in this life a genuine preparation for eternity, such that heaven itself is fundamentally a confirmation and intensification of the type of life which we are already leading here and now? Certainly the classical understanding of grace as the "seed of life which grows and fructifies for eternity"²⁵ would lend itself to this second alternative. In any case, for my own purposes I will presume that this latter understanding of heaven and hell is true, hence that the basic pattern of life which human beings pursue here and now in this world will have a decisive influence on what they enjoy by way of salvation in eternity.

People, for example, who have come to know and love the triune God in this life will surely know and love the divine Persons in the next. The intensity of the beatific vision will, moreover, be directly proportionate to the ardor with which these same individuals sought affective union with God in this life; for each will be rewarded with God's loving presence to the degree that he/she really desires it.²⁶ But what is to be said of those for whom "God" is a meaningless concept in this life? For many of them,

"Par-delà la mort," *Etudes* 337 (Nov. 1972) 605-18. There is, to be sure, a much more extensive literature on death as the moment of transition from time to eternity. Two well-known works to which I will make reference later are K. Rahner, *Zur Theologie des Todes* (Freiburg, 1968), and L. Boros, *The Moment of Truth*, tr. G. Bainbridge (London, 1962).

²⁴ *A Catechism of Christian Doctrine: Revised Edition of the Baltimore Catechism*, No. 3 (Paterson, N.J., 1941) p. 4.

²⁵ H. Rondet, S.J., *The Grace of Christ*, tr. T. Guzie, S.J. (Westminster: Md., 1968) p. 220. Rondet is referring here to an expression of Thomas Aquinas in the *Summa theologiae* 1-2, q. 114, a. 3, ad 3, but in his opinion it recapitulates the Johannine and Pauline understanding of grace as a new life, pledge of eternal glory, etc.

²⁶ Here one might object that, according to the Roman Catholic doctrine of purgatory, the souls of the just are purified so as to respond more freely and openly to God's love in heaven (*DS* 1580 [840]; 1820 [983]; cf. also Gleason, *op. cit.*, pp. 100-106). Yet the purification process in purgatory presumably does not eliminate the possibility of different degrees of happiness in heaven.

this will presumably mean that they will continue to lead "godless" lives in eternity as well. Life apart from God, after all, is the quintessence of what is traditionally meant by hell. My particular contention here, however, would be that the three divine Persons will not condemn such individuals to hell against their own will, but rather that They (Father, Son, and Spirit) will simply allow these people to choose what they want. If salvation for them, as represented by a lifetime of more or less deliberate choices, does not include union with the triune God as one of its principal components, then the three divine Persons will not force Themselves on Their reluctant creatures but instead allow them to pursue basically the same self-centered lives in eternity as they did in this life.²⁷ Admittedly, there is a problem here with other individuals who through no fault of their own, i.e., through "invincible ignorance," fail to come to a knowledge and love of the triune God in the course of their lives and thus enter eternity psychologically unprepared for a life of union with God. Here we must presume with Pius IX in his encyclical letter *Quanto conficiamur moerore*, that the three divine Persons in Their mercy and goodness will most certainly find a way in which to compensate these people for their life of virtue in this world.²⁸ Perhaps at the moment of death they will be given a new understanding of what they have been pursuing by way of human perfection in this life and thus will be in a position to choose a life of union with God on the very threshold of eternity.²⁹ The principle I wish to uphold, however, remains constant: the three divine Persons will not force us against our will into a life of union with Themselves. If we deliberately choose to ignore God in this life, we cannot expect miraculously to enjoy the beatific vision in the next.

Similarly, those who have really striven to know and love their fellow human beings in this life should experience an even greater sense of community with these same people in heaven. Those individuals, on the other hand, who are relatively self-centered now, i.e., isolated from or deliberately hostile to their neighbor, will quite possibly experience much the same reserve and hostility toward others in eternity. New friendships, of course, should be possible in eternity as part of one's ongoing growth and development as a person.³⁰ But the basic attitudes of

²⁷ Cf. Gleason, *op. cit.*, p. 116: "The man who dies in unrepented mortal sin damns himself. For hell does not issue from an arbitrary decision of God. It is the direct and logical prolongation of man's own will to sin."

²⁸ Cf. *DS* 2866 (1677).

²⁹ Cf. Boros, *op. cit.*, pp. 99-105.

³⁰ Cf., on the contrary, Gleason, *op. cit.*, p. 153: "One often wonders if there will be progress and an evolution of happiness in heaven. There will not be progress, because heaven is the infinite attainment of all our hopes, even the hope of progress itself." According to my presuppositions, however, heaven is eternal life. Life implies growth and

openness or hostility to deeper personal relations will presumably be fixed by one's history of personal friendships in this life. Everyone, in other words, will be basically the same person later as he/she is now. Only the external circumstances which in this life impeded the full exercise of our personhood will be removed.

To be specific, those who in this life have worked at loving God and their fellow human beings will surely be quite happy later, since they will then be free to love without any of the extrinsic limitations or distractions of our present human condition: e.g., separation from loved ones in space or time, psychological stress or physical illness, etc. Individuals, on the other hand, who have in this life chosen a more self-centered existence will likewise be free to pursue their special interests, at least in imagination and desire. Far from being truly happy with this arrangement, however, they will presumably suffer from acute boredom or ennui; for, since the range of their interests in this life was so narrowly circumscribed and since in eternity the "time" available to them for whatever they wish will be literally endless, they will inevitably find that "time" hangs heavy on their hands. Furthermore, since by their decisions in this life they have effectively excluded any possibility of union with God or a deeper interpersonal relationship with their neighbor, no relief from that never-ending preoccupation with themselves and their own petty interests would seem to be in sight.

Robert Gleason suggests that the damned will be psychologically torn apart by the conflict between *person* and *nature* at the core of their being: "As nature and being it [the soul in hell] still must seek God with all the energies of its being. But as a free being it continues to reject God as it did in life."²¹ Paradoxically, however, this seems to bring the damned into a deeply interpersonal relationship with God even against their own will; for hate as the dialectical opposite of love is an intense human emotion which binds the one who hates to the object of his/her hate just as firmly as love unites the lover with his/her beloved. According to my hypothesis, however, no such primitive feelings move the minds and hearts of those in hell. They feel, to be sure, no pain at the loss of the beatific vision or the lack of warm human relationships. But the very absence of such deeply human needs and desires is, as a matter of fact, the "punishment" which they inflict on themselves as a result of a life of self-indulgence.²²

development. Hence there must be growth and development for human beings in eternity, though within the parameters already fixed by the type of person one has become in this life.

²¹ Gleason, *op. cit.*, p. 122.

²² In his book *Love and Will*, psychologist Rollo May contends that one of the major problems facing men at present in our sexually permissive Western society is paradoxically

By way of contrast to Gleason, Karl Rahner's distinction between *person* and *nature* seems to confirm my hypothesis. Rahner says, for example, in an article on concupiscence, that any free choice of man "tends to the end that man should dispose of himself as a whole before God, actively make himself into what he freely wishes to be. Thus the end to which the free decision is orientated is that everything which is in man (nature), hence the involuntary act as well, should be the revelation and expression of what man as person wishes to be; thus that the free decision should comprehend, transfigure and transfuse the spontaneous act, so that its own reality too should no longer be purely natural but personal."²³ The finality of human existence, therefore, is that we should become persons, fully individuated human beings. Nature, that which we have in common with all other human beings, is a necessary condition for the realization of our personhood while in this life. In eternity, however, this personalization (or individualization) of our common human nature will presumably be complete, so that we will finally be the persons we always wanted to be in virtue of the more or less free decisions which we made while in this life.²⁴ That is, since the time of probation (or formation as a person) will be at an end, concupiscence, the spontaneous impulses of our bodily nature, will be completely subordinate to our free decisions as persons. Further growth and development as a person will still be possible, but only within the limits which we already set for ourselves in this life. Repentance—in the sense of a total reorientation of one's ideals as a person—will be impossible.

Rahner touches on this last point when he argues: "repentance is only possible where man's immoral free decision has not the power so exhaustively to impress evil upon his being that no starting-point for a new decision remains over from which a fresh disposition of the

apathy, and with it, as an inevitable consequence, sexual impotence (cf. Rollo May, *Love and Will* [New York, 1969] pp. 13-63). If this be true, it would seem to offer indirect empirical evidence for the validity of my hypothesis, namely, that people in hell are apathetic because of an antecedent life-decision for unrestricted self-indulgence.

²³ K. Rahner, S.J., "The Theological Concept of Concupiscence," *Theological Investigations* 1 (tr. C. Ernst, O.P.; London, 1961) 365. Cf. also Rahner's "The Dignity and Freedom of Man," *Theological Investigations* 2 (tr. K.-H. Kruger; Baltimore, 1963) 235-63; likewise, "Man as Spirit," in *Hearers of the Word*, tr. M. Richards (New York, 1969) 53-68. Other references could be cited, but these suffice to make clear Rahner's basic anthropology.

²⁴ Cf. Boros, *op. cit.*, pp. 25-31; Rahner, *Zur Theologie des Todes*, p. 30; C. Geffré, O.P., "La mort comme nécessité et comme liberté," *Vie spirituelle* 108 (1963) 264-80. All these authors regard death as the moment of final decision for a human being. But it is clear that their remarks apply with equal force to the afterlife, understood as the practical living-out or fruition of that final existential decision. Not every major theologian, however, is in agreement with this hypothesis of death as the moment of ultimate personal decision. Cf., e.g., W. Pannenberg, "Tod und Auferstehung in der Sicht christlicher Dogmatik," *Kerygma und Dogma* 20 (1974) 176-77.

elements of the human person could ensue. One's own morally wrong decision can only be experienced as inner distress and condemnation when it does not succeed in removing from one every resistance offered to it by what is given prior to freedom (by the 'nature')."³⁵ Rahner, of course, is thinking here of persons still in this life, i.e., of individuals who do not yet have perfect dominion over their natures. For my purposes, however, his remarks indirectly confirm in a striking way the hypothesis I have elaborated above. That is, because, as Rahner says, persons with perfect dominion over their natures have no metaphysical basis for repentance or a change of heart, we can suitably conclude that all human beings in eternity are basically "content," i.e., satisfied with themselves as the persons they have become and now are. Some individuals, to be sure, will have good reason to be content, since they will have found a high degree of self-fulfilment in union with God and their fellow human beings. Yet even the basically self-centered person will perforce have to be "content," since he/she will be unable, because radically unwilling, to change his/her predetermined pattern of existence.³⁶

SUPPORTING ARGUMENTS

At first reading, this might seem to be an absolutely preposterous idea, one which completely undermines the traditional notion of heaven and hell; for there is no hell—everybody seems to be in the "heaven" of his/her choice. Upon further reflection, however, there are a number of good reasons to take this hypothesis seriously. First of all, Christians have always had trouble reconciling the justice and the mercy of God. How can an all-loving and all-merciful God condemn human beings to an eternity of punishment for sins committed during the few years of their life on earth? On this hypothesis, however, the triune God does not condemn anyone to hell. Rather, out of deep respect for our freedom as human beings, the divine Persons allow us to choose our own mode of salvation. They would much prefer, of course, that we find salvation in and through union with Themselves and our fellow human beings; indeed, Their personal providence over us during the course of our mortal lives is directed precisely to that end. But if, in the final analysis, we seek out and deliberately choose a more self-centered pattern of existence, They will accept us just as we are. That is, Father, Son, and Spirit will

³⁵ Rahner, *art. cit.*, p. 367.

³⁶ Rahner has this remark about the radical profession of evil: "man could also be happy by making a heroic and radical profession of evil and by wholly delivering up his being to it (even though he may suffer 'physical' pain at the same time); only the evil man who is too cowardly and weak to be wholly evil would be the unhappy one" (*ibid.*, p. 367, n. 2). The people in hell have presumably made this radical profession of evil and thus "enjoy" some kind of happiness or contentment, even as, from another perspective, they experience acute boredom or ennui in the practical living-out of that decision.

let us have our own way, since only thus are we truly free and accountable for our decisions as persons.

A second reason in support of this hypothesis is that it does not reduce moral responsibility on the part of Christians and others who have always believed in heaven and hell, but rather, quite paradoxically, intensifies it. Since we can no longer expect a radical transformation from one type of person into another either at the moment of death or in virtue of some limited stay in purgatory, then it seems that we are more responsible here and now for what we will be as persons later, i.e., for all eternity. There may be, to be sure, a debt of temporal punishment still to be remitted after death and before admission into heaven, as the Church teaches at the Council of Trent.³⁷ But the remission of temporal punishment is clearly not meant to constitute a moral miracle, i.e., a total transformation of character, such as would invalidate my hypothesis about salvation as basically a matter of personal choice. Nor would deathbed conversions as such argue against my case, since the overt conversion in that instance would presumably be the climax of a much longer, hidden process of reconciliation taking place within the individual and known only to himself/herself and God. What my hypothesis, on the other hand, exposes as romantic nonsense is the naive belief that one can at the last minute "steal" one's way into heaven, after the example of the "good thief" on Calvary. The divine Persons respect us far too much as free and intelligent human beings not to give us in the end what we really want as salvation. The big question in life, however, is what do we really want or, in the words of Paul Tillich, what is our "ultimate concern"?³⁸ In this respect, the understanding of heaven and hell suggested here may help one to formulate that critical question for oneself early in life rather than at the moment of death.

A third argument favoring this hypothesis would be that the scriptural notion of heaven and hell as separated from each other by divine decree (cf. Lk 16:26) could be suitably reinterpreted in favor of the idea that the three divine Persons leave human beings completely free to choose their companions after death. If, then, there is an "abyss" between heaven and hell, it is the abyss created by the damned themselves in their persistent refusal to join the company of the elect. Joining these others in "heaven" (here understood as a specific place) would mean renunciation of thought- and behavior-patterns to which they became accustomed during their life on earth and which are "second nature" to them now. This is, of course, what they are psychologically unable to do, for the reasons suggested above. Hence they consciously choose to separate themselves from those who are more unselfish in their behavior-

³⁷ Cf. DS 1580 (840).

³⁸ Cf. P. Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith* (New York, 1958) p. 1.

patterns and seek out instead the company of those who, like themselves, lead a basically self-centered existence. "Hell" (once again understood as a specific place) is thus created not by divine decree as rather by human free choice.

C. S. Lewis expresses basically the same idea in a story entitled *The Great Divorce*. The story begins with the author wandering the streets of a drab, semi-deserted town at dusk. Boarding a bus with other people, he finds to his astonishment that they all are air-borne within a few minutes. The bus takes them to a brightly-lit grassy plateau in the sky where they disembark. Here the author discovers for the first time that he and all his fellow passengers are Ghosts, shadowy transparencies of flesh-and-blood human beings. Those whom they meet on the plateau, however, are full-bodied Spirits in the peak of health. Each of the Ghosts finds someone whom he/she knew in this life. They converse for awhile, with the Spirit in each case urging the Ghost to stay there and not return to the drab existence in the town below; but invariably the Ghost chooses to break off the conversation and to return to the bus for the trip below. The author meets a philosopher Spirit who enlightens him on the drama taking place between the Spirits and the Ghosts. The Ghosts are free to join the company of the Spirits in heaven, but first they must admit their need for God's love and be prepared to live unselfishly with their neighbors. This, however, they find too threatening to their present existence, however dull and disappointing it might be in itself; hence they reject the chance for true joy and happiness. Thus, says the Philosopher Spirit,

there are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, "Thy will be done," and those to whom God says, in the end, "Thy will be done." All that are in Hell choose it. Without that self-choice there could be no Hell. No soul that seriously and constantly desires joy will ever miss it. Those who seek find. To those who knock it is opened.³⁹

A fourth and final argument in confirmation of our hypothesis might be drawn from the way in which it unexpectedly illuminates traditional Christian belief in this life as a time of probation. According to my hypothesis, once this life is ended, the human personality is basically formed and human beings must live with themselves as the persons they actually have become. John Macquarrie, on the other hand, argues that even in eternity the sinner "never gets to the point of complete loss and so never gets beyond the reconciling activity of God."⁴⁰ While I would concur with Macquarrie that eternal life is not a static perfection but rather an ongoing growth in perfection for those who possess it,⁴¹ I would

³⁹ Cf. C. S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce* (New York, 1946) p. 69.

⁴⁰ Macquarrie, *op. cit.*, p. 327.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 322-23; also cf. n. 30 above.

still have to disagree with his further conclusion that the sinner could possibly be reconciled with God after death. As I see it, the basic issue is not that the divine Persons would be reluctant to forgive one of Their creatures beyond a given time limit, but that the creature himself/herself would not accept forgiveness, even if it were gratuitously offered to him/her. The basic attitude to God, in other words, would be already fixed by the character of one's relationship to the divine Persons in this life. Hence the creature would spontaneously reject as spurious any new overtures from the divine Persons for greater familiarity with Themselves, just as that same individual would presumably treat with suspicion any unexpected offers of friendship and familiarity from fellow human beings. Macquarrie's underlying objection, accordingly, to "the idea of a hell where God everlastingly punishes the wicked, without hope of deliverance"⁴² is invalidated in virtue of my hypothesis. God does not pass judgment on the sinner; the sinner passes judgment on himself/herself at the moment of death. Whatever "punishment" comes to the sinner in virtue of his/her sins is self-inflicted. Put in other terms, the three divine Persons always stand ready to forgive the sinner, but the sinner remains forever unwilling to be forgiven.

CONCLUSION

In summary, then, if one accepts the hypothesis elaborated in these pages, a new way to interpret the traditional Christian doctrine of heaven and hell can be expressed as follows. Human beings are called by God to become fully individuated persons and thus freely to choose their own mode of salvation. The three divine Persons, to be sure, deeply desire that we find our salvation in and through union with Themselves and our fellow human beings. But ultimately They will ratify whatever we choose by way of a personal life-style, an individualized salvation. Hence it is most important that men and women reflect seriously here and now on the practical consequences of their free decisions, since every choice contributes in some measure to what they already are as persons and to what they will enjoy by way of personal salvation in eternity.⁴³

Thus stated, this understanding of heaven and hell should be acceptable to Christians of both an eschatological and an incarnational

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 327.

⁴³ There is, of course, no way to verify this hypothesis in the present life. Yet some form of indirect verification of the theory might be available, given the way people seem to behave in this life. Is it not true, e.g., that we human beings gradually assume a definite "character" in virtue of the personal decisions we make over a lifetime? Furthermore, do we not as a rule become somewhat insensitive to the limits of our self-chosen character as life goes on? If all this be true, at least in the majority of cases, then it seems altogether plausible that, as suggested above, we enter eternity with relatively fixed personalities and that our happiness in the next life will be radically contingent upon the type of person we have become in this life.

bent of mind; for heaven and hell are clearly presented as the extraterrestrial realities which the Church's magisterium has always proclaimed them to be. Yet salvation is just as evidently linked with the development of human potentialities in this life, so that one and the same process of personal growth spans both time and eternity. On a pastoral level, moreover, the arguments offered here may assist Christians of both persuasions to face the reality of death and judgment with new hope and with greater confidence in God's loving kindness toward us; for, as Scripture says, "love will come to its perfection in us when we can face the day of Judgment without fear . . . because to fear is to expect punishment, and anyone who is afraid is still imperfect in love" (1 Jn 4:17-18).

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Austin Flannery, O.P. (General editor
1975, New York: Costello Publishing Co.

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**DECLARATION ON THE
RELATION OF THE CHURCH
TO NON-CHRISTIAN
RELIGIONS***

Vatican II, *Nostra Aetate*, 28 October, 1965

1. In this age of ours, when men are drawing more closely together and the bonds of friendship between different peoples are being strengthened, the Church examines with greater care the relation which she has to non-Christian religions. Ever aware of her duty to foster unity and charity among individuals, and even among nations, she reflects at the outset on what men have in common and what tends to promote fellowship among them.

All men form but one community. This is so because all stem from the one stock which God created to people the entire earth (cf. Acts 17:26), and also because all share a common destiny, namely God. His providence, evident goodness, and saving designs extend to all men (cf. Wis. 8:1; Acts 14:17; Rom. 2:6-7; 1 Tim. 2:4) against the day when the elect are gathered together in the holy city which is illumined by the glory of God, and in whose splendor all peoples will walk (cf. Apoc. 21:23 ff.).

Men look to their different religions for an answer to the unsolved riddles of human existence. The problems that weigh heavily on the hearts of men are the same today as in the ages past. What is man? What is the meaning and purpose of life? What is upright behavior, and what is sinful? Where does suffering originate, and what end does it serve? How can genuine happiness be found? What happens at death? What is judgment? What reward follows death? And finally, what is the ultimate mystery, beyond human explanation, which embraces our entire existence, from which we take our origin and towards which we tend?

2. Throughout history even to the present day, there is

a. Translated by Father Killian, O.C.S.O.

found among different peoples a certain awareness of a hidden power, which lies behind the course of nature and the events of human life. At times there is present even a recognition of a supreme being, or still more of a Father. This awareness and recognition results in a way of life that is imbued with a deep religious sense. The religions which are found in more advanced civilizations endeavor by way of well-defined concepts and exact language to answer these questions. Thus, in Hinduism men explore the divine mystery and express it both in the limitless riches of myth and the accurately defined insights of philosophy. They seek release from the trials of the present life by ascetical practices, profound meditation and recourse to God in confidence and love. Buddhism in its various forms testifies to the essential inadequacy of this changing world. It proposes a way of life by which men can, with confidence and trust, attain a state of perfect liberation and reach supreme illumination either through their own efforts or by the aid of divine help. So, too, other religions which are found throughout the world attempt in their own ways to calm the hearts of men by outlining a program of life covering doctrine, moral precepts and sacred rites.

The Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions. She has a high regard for the manner of life and conduct, the precepts and doctrines which, although differing in many ways from her own teaching, nevertheless often reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all men. Yet she proclaims and is in duty bound to proclaim without fail, Christ who is the way, the truth and the life (Jn. 1:6). In him, in whom God reconciled all things to himself (2 Cor. 5:18-19), men find the fulness of their religious life.

The Church, therefore, urges her sons to enter with prudence and charity into discussion and collaboration with members of other religions. Let Christians, while witnessing to their own faith and way of life, acknowledge, preserve and encourage the spiritual and moral truths found among non-Christians, also their social life and culture.

3. The Church has also a high regard for the Muslims. They worship God, who is one, living and subsistent, merciful and almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth,¹ who

1. Cf. St. Gregory VII, Letter 21 to Anzir (Nacir), King of Mauritania (PL 148, col. 450 ff.).

has also spoken to men. They strive to submit themselves without reserve to the hidden decrees of God, just as Abraham submitted himself to God's plan, to whose faith Muslims eagerly link their own. Although not acknowledging him as God, they worship Jesus as a prophet, his virgin Mother they also honor, and even at times devoutly invoke. Further, they await the day of judgment and the reward of God following the resurrection of the dead. For this reason they highly esteem an upright life and worship God, especially by way of prayer, alms-deeds and fasting.

Over the centuries many quarrels and dissensions have arisen between Christians and Muslims. The sacred Council now pleads with all to forget the past, and urges that a sincere effort be made to achieve mutual understanding; for the benefit of all men, let them together preserve and promote peace, liberty, social justice and moral values.

4. Sounding the depths of the mystery which is the Church, this sacred Council remembers the spiritual ties which link the people of the New Covenant to the stock of Abraham.

The Church of Christ acknowledges that in God's plan of salvation the beginning of her faith and election is to be found in the patriarchs, Moses and the prophets. She professes that all Christ's faithful, who as men of faith are sons of Abraham (cf. Gal. 3:7), are included in the same patriarch's call and that the salvation of the Church is mystically prefigured in the exodus of God's chosen people from the land of bondage. On this account the Church cannot forget that she received the revelation of the Old Testament by way of that people with whom God in his inexpressible mercy established the ancient covenant. Nor can she forget that she draws nourishment from that good olive tree onto which the wild olive branches of the Gentiles have been grafted (cf. Rom. 11:17-24). The Church believes that Christ who is our peace has through his cross reconciled Jews and Gentiles and made them one in himself (cf. Eph. 2:14-16).

Likewise, the Church keeps ever before her mind the words of the apostle Paul about his kinsmen: "they are Israelites, and to them belong the sonship, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises; to them belong the patriarchs, and of their race according to the flesh, is the Christ" (Rom. 9:4-5), the son of the virgin Mary. She is mindful, moreover, that the apostles, the

pillars on which the Church stands, are of Jewish descent, as are many of those early disciples who proclaimed the Gospel of Christ to the world.

As holy Scripture testifies, Jerusalem did not recognize God's moment when it came (cf. Lk. 19:42). Jews for the most part did not accept the Gospel; on the contrary, many opposed the spreading of it (cf. Rom. 11:28). Even so, the apostle Paul maintains that the Jews remain very dear to God, for the sake of the patriarchs, since God does not take back the gifts he bestowed or the choice he made.² Together with the prophets and that same apostle, the Church awaits the day, known to God alone, when all peoples will call on God with one voice and "serve him shoulder to shoulder" (Soph. 3:9; cf. Is. 66:23; Ps. 65:4; Rom. 11:11-32).

Since Christians and Jews have such a common spiritual heritage, this sacred Council wishes to encourage and further mutual understanding and appreciation. This can be obtained, especially, by way of biblical and theological enquiry and through friendly discussions.

Even though the Jewish authorities and those who followed their lead pressed for the death of Christ (cf. John 19:6), neither all Jews indiscriminately at that time, nor Jews today, can be charged with the crimes committed during his passion. It is true that the Church is the new people of God, yet the Jews should not be spoken of as rejected or accursed as if this followed from holy Scripture. Consequently, all must take care, lest in catechizing or in preaching the Word of God, they teach anything which is not in accord with the truth of the Gospel message or the spirit of Christ.

Indeed, the Church reproves every form of persecution against whomsoever it may be directed. Remembering, then, her common heritage with the Jews and moved not by any political consideration, but solely by the religious motivation of Christian charity, she deplors all hatreds, persecutions, displays of antisemitism leveled at any time or from any source against the Jews.^b

The Church always held and continues to hold that Christ out of infinite love freely underwent suffering and

death because of the sins of all men, so that all might attain salvation. It is the duty of the Church, therefore, in her preaching to proclaim the cross of Christ as the sign of God's universal love and the source of all grace.

5. We cannot truly pray to God the Father of all if we treat any people in other than brotherly fashion, for all men are created in God's image. Man's relation to God the Father and man's relation to his fellow-men are so dependent on each other that the Scripture says "he who does not love, does not know God" (1 Jn. 4:8).

There is no basis therefore, either in theory or in practice for any discrimination between individual and individual, or between people and people arising either from human dignity or from the rights which flow from it.

Therefore, the Church reproves, as foreign to the mind of Christ, any discrimination against people or any harassment of them on the basis of their race, color, condition in life or religion. Accordingly, following the footsteps of the holy apostles Peter and Paul, the sacred Council earnestly begs the Christian faithful to "conduct themselves well among the Gentiles" (1 Pet. 2:12) and if possible, as far as depends on them, to be at peace with all men (cf. Rom. 12:18) and in that way to be true sons of the Father who is in heaven (cf. Mt. 5:45).

2. Cf. Rom. 11:28-29; cf. Dogm. Const. *Lumen Gentium* (AAS 57, 1965, 20).

^bSee D. 37.

good

Joseph Bustillos
MT 533: Theology of Religious Encounter
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Essay Review: The Necessity for Jewish-Christian Dialogue, by Allan R. Brockway.

✓ I think I've had it with "Dialogue." I haven't had it with the term "Dialogue" or its possible meanings. It's just when it flies in the face of the "Exclusive" claims of Christianity (pardon me, I mean, Jesus Christ). Allan Brockway's essay seems to be another sad example of one with understanding but no discernment.

✓ The crimes that have been perpetrated in the name of Christianity in the past are numerous (as it is in all other facets of human existence, which should say something to those with discernment). Among those crimes was the loss of Christianity's Jewishness. The womb from which the faith was delivered, the language that it spoke, the reality that it perceived, the hope that it looked forward to, all of these things were Jewish. That is all well and good, but let's not confuse our heritage with our destiny. Let's not forget the point of that heritage, "She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." (Matt 1:21)

What does Brockway mean when he writes,

In reality, the Jewish people did not reject Jesus. Instead they rejected the church's claim that Jesus was the messiah promised by the prophets, as we have seen. It is this claim, rather than Jesus himself, that has been the major stumbling block for Jews when it comes to Christianity. (p. 4)

Does he really think that Jesus himself didn't claim to be the Messiah? And we're not talking about "a Messiah" but "The Messiah." It's pretty difficult to go any further with this discussion if the fallacy of such a denial is maintained. In his opening paragraph Brockway denies being an expert on Judaism, but it's obvious that he failed to mention the shortcomings of his understanding of the gospel of Jesus Christ. It's sad to read an article written by someone who has an affinity with the struggles and history of the Jewish people but forgets the God-given message that the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob has for them.

"I know that Messiah is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us." Then Jesus declared, "I who speak to you am he." (John 4:25-26).

THE NECESSITY FOR JEWISH-CHRISTIAN DIALOGUE

Collegium Doctorem
Reformed Church in Hungary
Debrecen, 23 August 1984

It is a great privilege and honor for me to participate in this annual meeting of the Collegium Doctorem and I thank you for the opportunity. I especially welcome the chance to speak with you concerning the present state of Jewish-Christian relations in the ecumenical movement, though I do so with some considerable hesitation.

Let me make clear in the beginning that I am not an expert on Judaism. My field is Jewish-Christian relations, and therefore focuses more on theological understandings of Christian faith than it does on Judaism as such. I will have something to say about what I consider to be the present and future consequences for Christian faith of open encounter with Judaism and the Jewish people, but first a brief look at the history of the inter-faith dialogue program of the World Council of Churches may be in order.

Inter-faith dialogue - at least as presently understood - is a relative late-comer to the ecumenical scene as, indeed, it is to the churches themselves. It was not until 1971, in fact, that the program sub-unit on Dialogue with People of Living Faiths was formed within the World Council of Churches. That does not mean, of course, that dialogue between and among Christians and believers of the other major religions of the world had not been present in the Council's life, for what came to be known as dialogue had existed in at least two important aspects of the church's life and mission for many, many years previously.

One of those aspects was the great missionary movement of the 19th and early 20th centuries, during which Christians came into direct contact with devout Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims, and others. Although formal reports to sponsoring mission boards may seldom have reflected its full extent, private correspondence and memoirs reveal that countless missionaries developed a profound understanding and appreciation of the religions among whose adherents they worked. There, on the "mission field", the practical development of

what has come to be the most central tenet of contemporary inter-faith dialogue began, as expressed in the World Council's Guidelines on Dialogue: "One of the functions of dialogue is to allow participants to describe and witness to their faith in their own terms. This is of primary importance since self-serving descriptions of other peoples' faith are one of the roots of prejudice, stereotyping, and condescension." I will indicate the way in which the apparent simplicity and self-evident nature of this "guideline" is actually profound and far-reaching.

The other precursor of the present program on inter-faith dialogue also comes from the 19th and early 20th century, although obviously its roots lie in the very beginning of the Christian church. I refer, of course, to the "mission to the Jews". During the early years of this century numerous churches and independent organizations were functioning with some variation on the theme, "The Christian Approach to the Jews", throughout Europe and North America. While the clear intent of these organizations was the conversion of Jews to Christianity, it is often forgotten that they were sometimes lone voices opposing antisemitism. Like their counterparts in Buddhist and Muslim societies, missionaries to the Jews came to know the religion of the people to whom they preached in a depth that was not common among Christians generally. Though their message was that the "messiah whom you expect has come", they evidenced profound love and concern for Jewish people, their traditions and way of life. Thus there was created within the International Missionary Council a "Committee on the Christian Approach to the Jews" that is the direct ancestor of the present "Consultation on the Church and the Jewish People" in the World Council of Churches.

It should be clear that the concern for "dialogue" is an outgrowth of the concern for Christian mission. The perceived dichotomy between "dialogue" and "mission" that has emerged within some parts of the ecumenical movement and its participating churches is all the more to be regretted, therefore. Those of us who are committed to inter-faith dialogue see ourselves as full participants in the mission of the church, which I will illustrate by turning our attention to the relation of the church to the Jewish people.

There can be no doubt that the relation of the church to the Jewish people is categorically different than it is to any other religious body. Christianity as we know it - or can conceive of knowing it - would not exist had it not been for the Jewish people and their covenantal relationship with the God of

Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Jesus was a Jew, as were all of his disciples and other early followers. Not only were they Jews but they were unquestioned participants in the full range of Torah observance. Through Jesus, Christians are tied to the Jewish people.

It goes without saying that nothing comparable is the case with any other religion or religious people. Though in principle the church could continue to be the church apart from Hinduism and Buddhism and Islam, without the Jewish people the church would cease to exist. Dialogue with Jews, therefore, is an imperative for the church. It is tragically strange that this fundamental reality has been denied throughout most of the centuries of the church's existence.

It is not necessary to recapitulate the sorry history of the church when it comes to the Jewish people. Suffice to say that the church at its inception defined itself as not Jewish: what it meant to be a Christian was not to be a Jew. It meant more than that, of course. It meant trust that the God of Israel had intervened in history in a new and unique way to tell his people that the culmination of history was at hand. Yet that intervention was a very "Jewish" intervention. Jesus represented the introduction of the Messianic Age, the age in which God would rule and all human history would conform to the design that God had established from the beginning. The earliest Christians probably were amazed that their fellow Jews could not accept this obvious truth.

But the truth was not so obvious to most first-century Jews. No signs of the messianic age were apparent. Justice wasn't being done, peace hadn't prevailed, social harmony was still a distant dream. Where was the messianic age? You simply can't have a messiah without it. Jews who became followers of Jesus struggled with this problem and came up with a solution: the Kingdom is coming and now is. That is, the Kingdom is here in principle, in embryo, but its complete realization is future. Thus Jesus is the messiah even though the messianic age has yet to arrive. Today's Christians should not be surprised that Jews are puzzled, at best, at what appears to be a contradictory assertion.

Several elements present in the preceding paragraphs are critical for the contemporary Jewish-Christian theological dialogue. The first is the obvious fact that Jesus, a Jew who lived and taught in the Promised Land - who, were

he alive today, would be called an Israeli - represents both the possibility and the difficulty in the Jewish-Christian dialogue.

The possibility resides precisely in Jesus' Jewishness. Because Jesus was an observant Jew throughout his life, the church which sprung from him is inescapably tied to and, in fact, defined by the Jewish people. At the very heart of the Christian faith is a Jew who embodied the entire history and tradition of his people. There can be, therefore, no more important Christian theological task than the effort to know and understand who Jesus of Nazareth really was, which is why dialogue with the Jewish people is so critically vital for Christian self-understanding. Through dialogue with Jews we Christians have the opportunity to know Jesus as we could not otherwise. Jewish-Christian dialogue is not an option for the church, it is a necessity.

Why? The difficulty in the dialogue, however, also resides with Jesus, and specifically with his Jewishness. From the time missionaries such as St. Paul took the Gospel into the gentile world, the Jewishness of Jesus and of the Gospel itself has been an embarrassment. Thus periodic attempts have been made to deny that Jesus was a Jew. Didn't the Jewish people themselves reject him? In reality, the Jewish people did not reject Jesus. Instead they rejected the church's claim that Jesus was the messiah promised by the prophets, as we have seen. It is this claim, rather than Jesus himself, that has been the major stumbling block for Jews when it comes to Christianity. But even that difficulty is beginning to be overcome, largely as a result of Christian theological thought stemming from the dialogue of the past fifty years.

No single factor has contributed more to the growth and continuance of antisemitism than the supposed Jewish rejection of Jesus: one has only to recall the terrible Christian persecution of Jews through the centuries as a result of the belief that the Jews killed Jesus, the messiah, and thus killed God (the "deicide charge"). Not only was this charge historically inaccurate and unjust, it confused the understanding of the messiah, which is a Jewish conception, with the church's doctrine of the incarnation, thus intensifying the charge into justification for hatred, persecution, and murder of Jews.

Though the bishops at Vatican II may not have been fully conscious of what they were saying, by formally rejecting the deicide charge they swept away two of the most formidable theological barriers to Jewish-Christian understanding. On the one hand they acknowledged doctrinally that the Jewish

people were not responsible for the death of Jesus, thus removing the historical justification for antisemitism. On the other hand, they opened the way for Christians to agree that Jesus was not the messiah promised by the prophets but instead was - and is - the Christ of the church, "very God of very God".

The implications for Jewish-Christian dialogue are obvious and far-reaching. When it is unnecessary for Christian doctrine to identify Christ with the messiah, it is possible to accept the Jewish denial of Jesus' messiahship on the basis of the understanding that the messiah is the human being who brings the messianic age (which obviously has yet to arrive). And, from the Jewish side, it becomes possible to understand the Christian testimony to the incarnation. The dialogue in this case become less threatening to Jews and Christians alike.

A second critical element for the contemporary Jewish-Christian dialogue is an increasing awareness of the significance of the fact that Christians worship the God of Israel. Again, the key to this awareness is Jesus, the Jew. As Christians we worship the God whom Jesus called Father, the God worshipped by his own people, revealed through the Hebrew Scripture and tradition. That Hebrew Scripture is our Old Testament through which we, along with the Jewish people, find revealed the God of Israel. Even the writings of the Apostles, our New Testament, are Jewish writings. They are, according to some Christian scholars midrashim on the Hebrew Bible. Certainly, the New Testament is incomprehensible without the Scriptures: when Jesus speaks of God, we know he speaks of the One who led his people out of bondage in Egypt and gave them the Torah at Sinai. The consciousness that we worship the God of Israel leads to a commendable humility when we enter into dialogue with Jews. But more than that it makes the necessity for Jewish-Christian dialogue clear and certain.

There are, of course, other theological concepts that Christians share with Jews, among them covenant, law, and salvation. But allow me to say a few more words about one that has traditionally been difficult for the dialogue: the trinity. If the Jewish people have a creed it is the Shema: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord (YHWH), the Lord our God is one God". At least one of the major imports of this line from Deuteronomy is the resolute rejection of polytheism: not only is God not divided into multiple deities but no other God exists. The God of Israel is Lord of the universe and all peoples and things that comprise it.

Because of this uncompromising monotheism, Jews are unable to accept the Trinity, which appears to them, despite Christian denials, to be scarcely veiled tri-theism. Again it is Jesus as the Christ that causes the most difficulty, for there is nothing in Jewish experience that can comprehend the incarnation of the creator and sustainer of the universe, the God of history, in a single human being. It is easier for them to understand the Holy Spirit, perhaps, because Jewish tradition includes such manifestations of God as the Shechina, the presence of God. But the incarnation remains a "stumbling block".

The incarnation has not always been easily understood by Christians either, a fact that often becomes painfully obvious in the Jewish-Christian dialogue. Through the dialogue Christians are driven to discover more lucid ways of understanding and communicating their own categories of faith. Even so, we must acknowledge that the doctrine of the Trinity is one of those places where Jews and Christians have little choice but to "agree to disagree".

I will conclude with a brief comment about two of the most difficult areas for the dialogue today: "missionizing" and the State of Israel. Most Jews today consider these to be "survival issues", by which they mean that the very existence of the Jews as a people is threatened.

Every Jew who converts to another religion, especially Christianity, is a loss to the Jewish people, which numbers only about 14 million in the entire world. Consequently, Jews resent deeply efforts by Christians to cause them to convert. The Christian community is divided when it comes to the question of efforts to convert Jews. Some are convinced that the conversion of the Jewish people is essential to Christian mission. Others believe equally strongly that conversion of Jews is ruled out because Jews already worship the God adored by Christians. Be that as it may, as a practical matter, most Jews will not engage in dialogue with Christians when they suspect that Christians' hidden purpose is conversion.

The World Council of Churches' Guidelines on Dialogue call for dialogue partners to allow each other to define themselves, as I noted at the beginning of this essay. It is sometimes difficult for Christians to observe this principle when it comes to the Jewish people's self-definition in terms of the State of Israel. But at the very least, it is important for Christians to recognize that contemporary Jews identify themselves with reference to Israel, believing that, should Israel be destroyed, the Jewish people would be

destroyed with it. In dialogue, Jews do not insist that Christians approve of everything the Israeli government does (just as Jews themselves do not), but they find it very difficult to dialogue with Christians who cannot accept their self-definition. The reasons for Jewish identity with Israel are complex, involving the nature of peoplehood and the concept of the Land, and for that very reason are part of the agenda for the Jewish-Christian dialogue.

One-third of the Jewish people was murdered during the Hitler period, a fact that conditions all relations between them and the church. That, plus the long centuries when the church persecuted the Jewish people for theological and other reasons, leads Jews to be cautious in their dealings with Christians. But many of them have learned that many Christians are genuinely eager to learn from the dialogue and actively to repent of the wrongs committed against the Jewish people.

The dialogue has taken enormous strides since the second World War, to the mutual benefit of Jews and Christians, but most of those strides have been taken by a relatively small group on each side. The next steps must involve translating what has been learned into the daily lives of Christian and Jewish congregations, into theological curricula, and into the preaching of ministers and rabbis. Christians believe that the Kingdom of God was begun on earth with Jesus and that it is the role of the church to show forth signs of that Kingdom. Important among those signs is the increased vitality of the Jewish-Christian dialogue, through which the Body of Christ meets warmly the People of God.

Evangelicals and Jews in an Age of Pluralism

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The Problem of Proselytization

An Evangelical Perspective

Vernon C. Grounds

For all the radical differences between Judaism and Christianity, these two monotheistic religions share striking similarities. They share a kind of mother-daughter relationship; or, as the apostle Paul puts it in his letter to the Romans, Christianity is a branch grafted into the olive tree of Israel. Family commonalities ought, therefore, to elicit little surprise. Both faiths venerate the Old Testament as Holy Scripture. Both worship the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Both believe in a promised Messiah, whether as in the case of Judaism it is still a prospective belief or as with Christianity retrospective. Both subscribe to the same moral principles epitomized in the Ten Commandments; hence both highlight love, justice, and personal responsibility. In addition, while once again stressing their vast differences, both religions recognize the duty of bearing witness and making converts.

I, as an evangelical, must speak about Judaism from the perspective of a relatively uninformed outsider, yet there seems little doubt that Jews have traditionally regarded witness as a sacred obligation. In the words of Daniel Polish, the term *witness*

... has no cachet in the religious language of the Jews. Its appearance in our conversation is an importation from neighboring territory. In its most elemental sense, redolent, as it is in

English, with overtones of legal process, it is, of course, familiar. The Hebrew equivalent of "witness" *ed*, carries a network of associations in its wake. Isaiah 43:10—"you are my witnesses" says the Lord," sounds a central chord of the Jewish experience. . . .

The witness, in the strictest sense of the term is not simply one who speaks for another. Rather he is one who takes formal oath and gives testimony to some fact concerning the other. Such oath in biblical theology is serious business indeed, with immediate implications for the witness and consequences for future generations. Biblical oaths have a physical component: the witness places his hand under the thigh of the one to whom he is swearing. This is what Eliezer does to Abraham in Genesis 24 as he is about to embark on the mission that will assure his master of the descendants whom he had been promised. This graphic act has its counterpart in the Roman practice that provided the etymological root of the English word testify: the witness takes the preliminary oath with his hands clutching his own testes. The implication of these acts underscores the dreadful seriousness of witnessing. To witness is to declare that upon which one would stake, not his good name alone, but something far more serious—the existence of his progeny and their descendants.¹

Ben Zion Bokser, discussing "Witness and Mission in Judaism," refers to the "profound awareness" in Talmudic literature "that the Jewish people were under a commitment to share the teachings of their faith with the peoples of the outside world." The rabbis, for example, interpreted the whole career of Abraham as that of a missionary actively "disseminating his faith." Typically they regarded Genesis 12:5, "And Abram took Sarai his wife . . . and the persons which they had acquired in Haran" (NASB), as an allusion to the converts won to their God by that faithful patriarch and his wife.²

Bokser also writes that during the Graeco-Roman era, Judaism was vigorously evangelistic, waging "an active missionary campaign to win converts and Godfearers to its banner. In many cases, the missionaries were Jewish traveling merchants who propagated their beliefs among the people with whom

they came in contact. We have the evidence of contemporary documents that these efforts were far-reaching."³

As evidence of the far-reaching missionary activity of Jews in these centuries, Bokser cites the "gibe at the Pharisees" in Matthew 23:15. "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him two-fold more the child of hell than yourselves."

Sometimes in their zealous concern Jewish proselytizers would even resort to the strong-arm techniques which equally zealous Christians were later to employ so shamelessly. At least Josephus records that in the age of the Maccabees, Judaism used force in attempting to convert the Idumeans and Ituraeans.⁴

In the light of this concern with witness and conversion, one can understand why Samuel Sandmel thinks the Christian church spread so rapidly in the Roman world because—among other reasons, to be sure—"its way had been prepared by a Jewish missionary impulse."⁵ That impulse was squelched, however, when Constantine in the fourth century forbade Jews to make converts, as Muslim rulers likewise did in the seventh century. But surreptitiously Jewish missionary activity continued.

In medieval Spain, though, a church council decreed death for any Jew who so much as attempted to win over a Christian, and by 1492 Spanish Jews faced one of three dire choices: flee the country, be killed, or profess conversion. No wonder that Judaism lost its missionary spirit. No wonder, either, given persecutions and pogroms, that Jews throughout most of the Christian epoch have been reluctant to obey Jehovah's directive, "Ye are my witnesses." And yet a modern Jewish philosopher, Hermann Cohen, could remind his suffering people that their very suffering was the concomitant of a divine task, that of bearing witness to the world. "This historical suffering of Israel gives it its historical dignity, its tragic mission, which represents its share in the divine education of mankind. What other solution is there for the discrepancy between Israel's historical mission and its historical fate? There is no other solution but the one which the following consideration offers: to suffer for the dissemination of monotheism, as the Jews do, is not a sorrowful

fate; the suffering is, rather, its tragic calling, for it proves the heartfelt desire for the conversion of the other peoples, which the faithful people feels."⁶

Recently, moreover, American Jews under the leadership of Rabbi Alexander Schindler and Rabbi Sanford Seltzer—no doubt there are other leaders as well—have been urging that Judaism revert to its ancient practice and seek to bring converts into its fold from among the religiously unaffiliated. Thus, in his presidential address to the Board of Trustees of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations on December 2, 1978, Schindler said: "I believe that it is time for our movement to launch a carefully conceived Outreach Program aimed at all Americans who are unchurched and who are seeking roots in religion. . . . My friends, we Jews possess the water that can slake the thirst, the bread that can sate the great hunger. Let us offer it freely, proudly—for *our* well-being and for the sake of those who earnestly seek what it is ours to give."

This program, I understand, is low-key but multifaceted, utilizing newspaper ads and articles, books, tracts, filmstrips, and instruction classes. It is, please note, aimed only at the unchurched and religiously unaligned segment of our population. Yet it is a program, according to Rabbi Alan Flan, which is developing "sensible, responsible, intelligent ways to give people an idea of what the options for Jewish life entails." Flan has therefore exhorted his coreligionists, "We should open our arms to the person who is seeking to become a Jew."⁸ And perhaps, one surmises, even stimulate that desire.

As for Christianity, its very genius is evangelism. Emil Brunner's aphorism, "The church exists by mission as a fire exists by burning," expresses the drive and dynamic of the New Testament. Let me give a rapid review of some relevant texts. During his ministry, Jesus, as reported by the fourth Gospel, utters this astonishing claim, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6). Then after the resurrection he lays a mandate of universal sweep on his disciples: "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost,

teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world" (Matt. 28:19–20).

This mandate is repeated at the ascension when Jesus delineates the global dimensions of the church's ministry: "But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

In obedience to the Lord's solemn commission, Peter, preaching in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost, summons his polyglot audience to conversion: "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call" (Acts 2:38–39). A little later he delivers a second sermon and renews his summons, "Repent . . . and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out" (Acts 3:19).

Like Peter, only even more powerfully, Paul after his own dramatic conversion pleads with Jews and Gentiles for a simultaneous renunciation and commitment—a renunciation of whatever religion they formerly professed and a commitment to the new and solely salvific faith in Jesus Christ. So, explaining his motive and mission to the church at Rome, he declares: "I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise. So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also. For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek" (Rom. 1:14–16).

In that same letter he exclaims with intense emotion: "Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved. For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God" (Rom. 10:1–3).

Writing to a group of Christians in Corinth, Paul defends himself against the allegation of inconsistency: "For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more. And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law; To them that are without law, as without law, (being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ,) that I might gain them that are without law. To the weak became I as weak; that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some" (I Cor. 9:19-22).

And it is Paul who affirms in his Letter to the Galatians: "But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed" (Gal. 1:8-9).

Texts like these—and in the New Testament there are many more—have inspired Christians to become tireless evangelists and missionaries carrying their message literally to the ends of the earth and indiscriminately viewing every nonconverted human being, pagan, Jew, Hindu, Muslim, animist, and atheist alike, as a soul for whom the Savior died and with whom the Good News must be shared. Taken at face value, these texts challenge Rabbi Schindler's opinion that "there is no clear New Testament basis or mandate to justify the efforts to convert Jews." They challenge, too, his assertion that Jews are "outside the need for a Christian form of redemption."⁹

Granted that from the Jewish perspective the issue is by no means as simplistic as I have stated it, what I have stated is incontestably the understanding of the New Testament missionary imperative which has traditionally been held by Christians. Consider, for example, the Bethel Confession, formulated by German Christians during the early stages of Naziism with none other than Dietrich Bonhoeffer as one of its primary authors:

The Church has received from its Lord the commission to call the Jews to repentance and to baptize those who believe on

Jesus Christ to the forgiveness of sins (Matthew 10:5ff.; Acts 2:38ff; 3:19-26). A mission to the Jews which for cultural reasons refuses to baptize any more Jews at all is refusing to be obedient to its Lord. The crucified Christ is to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks folly (I Corinthians 1:22ff.). "The Crucified One" as little accords with the religious ideal of the Jewish soul as it does with the religious ideal of the soul of any other nation. Faith in him cannot be given by flesh and blood even to a Jew, but only by the Father in heaven through his Spirit (Matthew 16:17).¹⁰

The language is unambiguous. Jews, no less than Aryans, having come to repentance and faith, must be baptized into the Christian church.

Hence, to sum up the historic belief and practice of Christianity regarding this matter—and American evangelism still adheres to this position—obedience to the crucified and risen Lord demands witness to and, God so disposing, conversion of Jews.

With all of its theological presuppositions and outworkings, this position inevitably lays evangelicalism open to the charge of being intolerably proud and arrogant. Among the accusations leveled against it is that of an insufferable dogmatism. Not content with a humble and genteel relativism, Christianity in its evangelical branch claims to possess almighty God's fixed and final truth. So Harriet Van Horne, *New York Post* columnist, praised presidential candidate Jimmy Carter for having "risen above the narrow tenets of his church," but at the same time suggested that "it might be more tactful for Governor Carter to cite the Judeo-Christian ethic rather than attributing all his talk of love and humility to the teachings of Jesus."¹¹ Indeed, she inquired, "Why should any religious sect consider its view of God the only one?" Or, we might well add, its view of salvation?

And precisely its view of salvation exposes evangelicalism to the charge not only of dogmatism but of exclusivism as well. The sole repository of redemptive truth, it alone—so runs the evangelical claim—holds the key which unlocks the door into a blessed eternity. Its interpretation of who Jesus was and what He did is the one guaranteed way of redemption. Peter asserts

this flatly, and evangelicals hold that Peter's words are God's Word: "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). And the entail of this exclusivism is according to its critics a shockingly obtuse elitism, voiced ironically in some lines by a bard whom I have been unable to identify:

We are the Lord's elected few.
Let all the rest be damned.
There'll be no room above for you:
We don't want heaven crammed.

That, I must emphatically protest, is not the spirit of authentic evangelicalism; but it is, I confess, an attitude occasionally displayed by some Christians.

Still further, evangelicalism is accused of narcissism, a "vulgar group narcissism," to purloin a phrase from John Murray Cudihy. It is accused, too, of what in Roman Catholic circles was once designated triumphalism or what an early twentieth-century fundamentalist, Ford Otuman, called the imperialism of Jesus, a crusading mentality that engenders fanaticism and motivates an aggressive, coercing, high pressure proselytism . . . and might, consequently, in the name of God, be sowing the poisonous seeds of anti-Semitism. Evangelicals like myself are aware of these charges and, while conscientiously thinking through and living out our faith, struggle unremittently to prevent deep conviction from developing into the kind of deadly animosity which stoked the furnaces of Auschwitz.

Not only that. We are compelled to deal with the question which Rabbi Schindler raises. Why do we contend (Can we possibly do it without being acrimoniously contentious?) that Jews are not, definitely not, "outside the need for a Christian form of redemption"? Why do we teach and preach that Judaism as a religion fails to qualify Jews as non-candidates for evangelism? That question is being answered in depth and at length as we carry on our dialogue in this conference. We evangelicals are candidly setting forth the answers which we

find convincing though they may not prove at all persuasive to our Jewish friends. I assume, then, that it falls within my province as a participant to give a brief answer which I take to be the New Testament answer.

Alienated from God by sinful disobedience, Jews, together with all members of the human family, are lost. But in his unchanging faithfulness and fathomless grace God has been redemptively at work in history reconciling the self-estranged race of Adam to himself. In doing that he long millennia ago challenged Abraham to enter into a unique relationship with himself and thereby embark on a unique mission. In faith Abraham responded. The subsequent history of Israel issues from the covenant thus established. The Jews, God's chosen people, became the recipients of supernatural truth and an efficacious system of atoning sacrifice. The Israeliish theocracy, however, was simply a framework within which God was providing the possibility of a faith-full and faithful relationship with himself duplicating the Abrahamic pattern. From among these people who were Jews ethnically, he was drawing into redemptive fellowship with himself a people who were Israelites spiritually. Yet he intended that Judaism *qua* religion be temporary and preparatory, the foundation on which a new faith, a new covenant, and a new relationship would in the fullness of time be established.

Following the New Testament argument, therefore, as elaborated especially in the anonymous letter to the Hebrews, we evangelicals maintain that by the whole Christ-event Judaism *qua* religion has been superseded, its propaedeutic purpose accomplished. Since Messiah has come and offered his culminating sacrifice, there is, as we see it, no temple, no priesthood, no altar, no atonement, no forgiveness, no salvation, and no eternal hope in Judaism as a religion. Harsh and grating expressions as to its salvific discontinuity are called for—abrogation, displacement, and negation. And those expressions are set down here, I assure you, with some realization of how harsh and grating they must indeed sound to Jewish ears.

Admittedly, Christian theologians have disagreed sharply among themselves concerning God's present relationship to

his chosen people; and those disagreements persist within the Protestant wing of Christendom. Gerald Anderson, for one, strongly avers that "the covenant in Christ does not displace, cancel, repudiate or annul the covenant with Israel." He avers, rather, that "Christ fulfills and completes the covenant," and in support of his argument he appeals to both a Protestant and a Catholic theologian. "Emil Brunner emphasizes that the New Testament 'radical understanding of doctrine of justification by faith implies . . . not merely continuity with the Old Testament conception of faith as faithful obedience, but at the same time constitutes its completion. . . .'" Rosemary R. Reuther rightly recognizes that 'the most fundamental affirmation of Christian faith is the belief that Jesus was Christ; he was that Messiah whom the prophets "foretold" and the Jewish world "awaited." On this affirmation everything else in Christian theology is built.'"¹²

Gerald Sloyan sides with Anderson as to the continuity of the unique bond between God and Israel. He concludes his book-length investigation of Paul's text, "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness" (Rom. 10:4), by declaring: "To claim that Christianity derives from the Hebrew revelation is to see the election, covenant, promises, and Law of the Jews as permanently valid. No service can be done to God by declaring his work completed by the Christian revelation which has as its result the destruction or negation of the Hebrew revelation. Christ is the end of the Law as its completion, but not as its abrogation."¹³

The contrary thesis of discontinuity goes back, however, to the earliest centuries of the church. Tertullian, rebutting Marcion's polemic against Christianity as a religion which worships a God who changes his mind, sees in the very abolition of the Old Testament system a confirmation of Jehovah's faithfulness.

We too claim that the primary epistle against Judaism is that addressed to the Galatians. For we receive with open arms all that abolition of the ancient law. The abolition itself derives from the Creator's ordinance. . . . But if the Creator promised that the old things would pass away, because, he said, new

things were to arise, and Christ has marked the date of that passing, . . . the apostle . . . invalidates the old things while validating the new, and thus has for his concern the faith of no other God than that Creator under whose authority it was even prophesied that the old things were to pass away. Consequently both the dismantling (*destructio*) of the law and the establishment of the gospel are on my side of the argument. . . . Therefore the whole intent of this epistle is to teach that departure from the law results from the Creator's ordinance (V, 2)."¹⁴

And previously in Book IV of that same work, *Adversus Marcionem*, Tertullian refuses to concede that the new covenant contradicts the old. It is "different" but not "contradictory." "I do admit that there was a different course followed in the old dispensation under the Creator, from that in the new dispensation under Christ. I do not deny a difference in records of things spoken, in precepts for good behavior, and in rules of law, *provided* that all these differences have reference to one and the same God, that God by whom it is acknowledged that they were *ordained* and also *foretold*" (IV, 1)."¹⁵

Tertullian can serve as a spokesman for those evangelicals who interpret the new covenant as different from the old covenant yet not a renunciation of its promises—a fulfillment, instead. By faith in the culminating and final sacrifice, adumbrated and typified by the Hebrew sacrificial system, a believer, whether Jew or Gentile, becomes with Abraham a true Israelite, included within God's redeemed people.

It should be added that evangelicals who embrace a premillennial eschatology foresee a prophetic future for the Jews as an ethnic entity, with Palestine as the center of Christ's planetary kingdom. But this restoration nationally does not affect the destiny of Jews individually. God's prophetic promises will assuredly be kept; but if a Jew is to experience the Abrahamic relationship to his creator, it must be through faith; yes, faith in the Messiah who has already come, Jesus Christ. In short, as James Parkes, the distinguished Anglican scholar who was an authority on Jewish-Christian beliefs and a devoted friend of the old covenant people, summarized the relationship between these two biblical faiths, Judaism is "not an alternative scheme

of salvation to Christianity, but a different kind of religion."¹⁶ And that is why from the evangelical perspective Jews fail to qualify as non-candidates for evangelism. There is no "alternative scheme of salvation to Christianity."

But the traditional position is so offensive that many Christians have been joining with Jews in a determined battle to bring about its modification or, preferably, its abandonment. This battle is going on along three fronts—civility, history, and theology. First, an appeal is made to *civility*: evangelicalism ought to consider far more seriously the virtue of a kind of henotheistic tolerance. Second, an appeal is made to *history*: evangelicalism ought to ponder far more deeply the horror of anti-Semitism. Third, an appeal is made to *theology*: evangelicalism ought to evaluate far more open-mindedly the option of doctrinal reconstruction.

Take, to start with, the appeal to civility. This subject has been brilliantly explored and expounded by John Murray Cuddihy in his sociological study, *No Offense: Civil Religion and Protestant Taste*. One of the major figures on whom he focuses is Reinhold Niebuhr, the world-renowned Protestant ethicist, long a luminary at Union Theological Seminary in New York City. In an address on "The Relations of Christians and Jews in Western Civilization" which he delivered in 1958 before a joint meeting of his own faculty and that of the Jewish Theological Seminary, Niebuhr opted outright for a permanent moratorium on the evangelization of Jews. He endorsed the view proposed by philosopher Franz Rosenzweig that Christianity and Judaism are "two religions with one center, worshipping the same God, but with Christianity serving the purpose of carrying the prophetic message to the Gentile world." This, Niebuhr avowed, is a far better view than those conceptions of the two faiths (even, Cuddihy asks, that of the apostle Paul?) "which prompt Christian missionary activity among the Jews." Granted that there are some differences between the two religions. Yet those are really minor, and a Jew can find God "more easily in terms of his own religious heritage than by subjecting himself to the hazards of guilt feelings." Moreover, Christianity is "a faith which, whatever

its excellencies, must appear to (the Jew) as a symbol of an oppressive majority culture." Because of ineffaceable anti-Semitic stains, "Practically nothing can purify the symbol of Christ as the image of God in the imagination of the Jew." Such was the essence of Niebuhr's address.

I can do no better service at this point than simply set before you Cuddihy's devastating critique of this blockbusting proposal.

Note, first, how the *Children of Light* distinction between faith and its "expression" reappears; expression has now become—perhaps under the influence of Tillich—"symbol." Note also that Christian faith seems to exist only in its symbols, viz., "as it appears" to the Jew—"conditioned" (tainted)—or as it appears to the believer, i.e., as bearer of the "unconditioned." The "truth-value" of Christianity "in itself" seems to play no role. Note, further, that Christianity appears, to the Jew, as "culture" (an "oppressive majority" culture); and, further, that—given history—it *must* so appear to him; Jews are not free vis-à-vis Christianity to see it for what-in-itself it really is.

In this attitude of Niebuhr, it may be asked, is there not a stubborn residue of the same condescension to Jews that he is in the very act of disavowing? For Christians, like Niebuhr, are apparently able to understand not only their own Christianity and its true attitude to Jews, but also how Christianity must "look" to Jews. Christians, in other words, are able to take the role of Jews to Christianity, whereas Jews, for their part, are, by implication, deemed incapable of reciprocating by taking the role of Christians to themselves. Furthermore, Christians are the only ones who understand this whole process inasmuch as they alone understand that the Jewish *lack* of understanding is itself "understandable." Further, Jews are *expected* by Christians to be incapable of finding the Christian position on Jewish conversion "understandable." And, finally, only Christians, it would seem, and not Jews, find this Jewish inability to understand in turn understandable. Note, finally, a curious further implication of Niebuhr's proposal: namely, that even in the (one would have supposed) "privileged" matter of defining one's own religion's relation to another religion, Niebuhr is proposing that that other's "outsider" view of one's own religion—even if

erroneous, nay, because it is erroneous—become normative for one's own definition of one's own religion.

The mind boggles!

Little wonder, consequently, that Cuddihy thinks Niebuhr's address might be adjudged "an exercise in expiatory masochism" and even a "sell-out."

Yet the famous ethicist does have reasons, to be sure, for advocating this radical break with Christian tradition. After all, doubt, humility, and toleration on his reckoning are the earmarks of a truly religious person. Certitude, pride, and intolerance are, on the contrary, incompatible with a recognition of the "historical contingency and relativity" which inevitably accompany human finitude, to say nothing about the logic-twisting effects of human sin. In Niebuhr's judgment, "our toleration of truths opposed to those which we confess is an expression of the spirit of forgiveness in the realm of culture. . . . Like all forgiveness, it is possible only if we are not too sure of our own virtue. . . . toleration of others requires broken confidence in the finality of our own truth." And tolerance is the offspring not of indifferentism but rather of that intellectual modesty exhibited by high-minded individuals "with a sufficient degree of humility to live amicably with those who have contradictory opinions."¹⁷

But these reasons strike Cuddihy as specious. He wonders whether the root motive for Niebuhr's proposal is civility, a desire to avoid being a Pauline scandal and stumbling block to his numerous intercredal friends. Never once apparently does Niebuhr raise the issue of truth. How tactless to do that! For, as Rabbi Arthur Hertzberg has remarked, "The survival of Judaism in America is endangered by many things; but I believe that it's single greatest enemy is vulgarity."¹⁸

With all this as background, listen now to Cuddihy's answer to his self-propounded question, "Why, then, was the Christian mission to the Jews abandoned by the Protestants?"—as it has been by sizeable segments of non-Roman Catholic Christianity and by a number of influential Roman Catholic theologians: "Not because Christ and Paul had not commanded it (they

had); not because it was false to Christianity (it was of its essence); but because of appearances; *it was in bad taste.* As Marshall Sklare notes, by 1970 the Jewish Community was publicly opposing the Christian mission to the Jews 'on the grounds that Reinhold Niebuhr had elaborated a decade before,' namely—in Sklare's words—because of 'the unseemliness' of such evangelization."¹⁹

Impressed though I am by Cuddihy's probing study, I incline nevertheless to place more weight than he does on Niebuhr's epistemological skepticism. The inability to apprehend truth with certainty and finality means we can repose only a "broken confidence" in our faith-formulations. Civility and relativism, in other words, are Siamese twins. And why risk social ostracism by insisting that one's friends embrace one's dubious surmises about reality and destiny?

In the second place, the modification (preferably the abandonment) of the traditional Christian assumption that Jews, like the adherents of all other religions, need to accept the gospel is being urged as an antidote against the recurrent malady of anti-Semitism. Thus an appeal is made to history. Ponder, evangelicals are rightly exhorted, the heart-breaking pages of Israel's tragic saga. Realize that it is Christianity which at bottom has been either primarily, or at any rate largely, responsible for the centuries-long persecution that reached its nadir in the Nazis' ghastly "final solution of the Jewish problem." Trace the connection between New Testament anti-Judaism and the anti-Jewish pogroms in Christian (I choose to let the adjective stand without enclosing it in exculpating quotation marks) Europe and America. Do that and you may decide a moratorium on the evangelism of your Jewish friends and neighbors is in order.

Here, frankly, evangelicals are hard put to gain clear perspective. Not regarding the incredible, emotion-numbing insanity of an Auschwitz. Not that by any means! Instead, we are hard put to evaluate objectively the allegation that the preaching of the gospel has inspired anti-Semitism and may—God forbid!—do so again in the future. How just, we must interrogate our souls, is that allegation?

The core of the gospel, we are reminded, is the cross, the

story of a judicial murder. Perpetrated by the Romans, it was brought about by the hateful connivance of those enemies whom Jesus had stirred up within his own nation. Can this story be told, we are asked, without eliciting the vindictive taunt (or thought), "Jewish Christ-killers! Jewish Christ-killers!"? Can it be told, as traditionally it has been, and not breed animosity against, say, members of a Brooklyn synagogue who have never heard the names of Annas and Caiaphas? Can it be told and not serve to exonerate the infliction of suffering on the Jews as a penalty merited by their guilt? Recall that at the close of the third century Chrysostom condemned the "odious assassination" of Christ by the Jews, for whom there is, he declaimed, "no expiation possible, no indulgence, no pardon." Recall, too, that in the twentieth century so noble a Christian as Dietrich Bonhoeffer, challenging the Aryan clauses which Hitler had adopted, wrote this sentence: "The church of Christ has never lost sight of the thought that the 'chosen people,' who nailed the redeemer of the world to a cross, must bear the curse for its action through a long history of suffering."²⁰ With amplest good reason, therefore, Jules Isaac asserts in his *Teaching of Contempt*, "No idea has been more destructive and has had more deadly effect in the scattered Jewish minorities living in Christian countries than the pernicious view of them as the 'deicide people.'"²¹

Besides believing that Israel as a nation was guilty of murdering its incarnate God, Christians also believe, we are further reminded, that Jewish guilt grows higher and higher as Jesus' own people stubbornly persist in their refusal to accept him as Messiah. And this is the belief of not merely benighted fundamentalists. No, it is a common Christian belief. Even a theologian of Karl Barth's stature and sensitivity entertained it. In 1957, a long time after Auschwitz, he authorized without change what he had written in 1942: "There is no doubt that Israel hears; *now less than ever* can it shelter behind the pretext of ignorance and inability to understand. But Israel hears—and does not believe!"²² And in not penitently acknowledging its Messiah Israel goes on obdurately heaping up its guilt.

Not surprisingly, therefore, history reveals that a dark and

destructive attitude toward Jewish people develops as a concomitant of gospel proclamation. In the story of Jesus the sinister villain is Israel: it is the lightning rod that draws to itself the sizzling electricity of Christian wrath.

As evangelicals, what ought to be our response to this indictment? We have, I reply, an inescapable obligation to do whatever we can in order to clear away the misunderstandings and misinterpretations which have dyed the pages of history with Jewish blood. We must point out, for one thing, that the nation Israel as an entity was no more guilty of crucifying Jesus than we were; maybe, in fact, we were more so. Suffice it to say here that a careful examination of the Gospels puts the burden of responsibility for the crucifixion of Jesus on the shoulders of the imperial government in Palestine. So Jules Isaac inquires whether the Roman soldiers and their commanding officer were acting on orders from Judas or Caiaphas. "They were acting," he comments, "on orders from Pilate who had sent them." Then Isaac comments again, "Common sense tells us that in such cases the greater responsibility lies with those who command the greater power—in other words with Pilate."²³ Hence in refuting the charge that the Jewish people were Christ-killers, we evangelicals must attest with Roy Eckardt that "'Roman responsibility' is a purely historical, superseded matter, while 'Jewish responsibility' is hardly at all a historical matter; it is an existential one."²⁴ For what Christian today, he asks, would ever shout at a citizen of Rome the taunt, "You killed Christ!"? That would be the nonsensical equivalent of indiscriminately charging a crowd of contemporary Americans, "You killed Abraham Lincoln!"

We evangelicals must likewise attest that any Jewish responsibility was limited to a handful of corrupt leaders and their hangers-on. Eugene Fisher argues that in a way those leaders were not really leaders: "Cut off from the people and living by collaboration with Rome, the temple priesthood must have developed a quite natural 'seige mentality.' Eager to please their Roman superiors, they would zealously seek to bring to the attention of Pilate even the slightest hint of rebellion. . . . They were not the truly religious leaders of the day, the Pharisees.

Rather the individuals involved were only the 'chief priests and the scribes,' the Sadducean party of the aristocracy who had sold out to Rome in the view of the people and represented no more than their own selfish interests."²⁵

We evangelicals must attest, once more, that since Jesus died for the sin of the world, every human being bears the responsibility for the cross, Christians no less than Jews (and Christians, I repeat, more than Jews). Lest this attestation stir within our deceitful hearts even a flicker of self-righteousness, we evangelicals need to remember that it is actually a belated echo of Article IV of the Catechism of the Council of Trent promulgated in the sixteenth century: "In this guilt are involved all those who fall frequently into sin; for, as our sins consigned Christ the Lord to the death of the cross, most certainly those who wallow in sin and iniquity *crucify to themselves again the Son of God, as far as in them lies, and make a mockery of him*. This guilt seems more enormous in us than in the Jews, since according to the testimony of the same apostle: *If they had known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory*; while we, on the contrary, professing to know him, yet denying him by our actions, seem in some sort to lay violent hands on him" (Hebrews 6:6; I Corinthians 2:8).²⁶ The recognition of our personal responsibility for the Savior's death is, as James Daane suggests, "the spiritual solvent that ought to dissolve anti-Semitism in the Christian community."

Penitent for his own role in crucifying the Son of God, cognizant of his infinite guilt for such an act, the Gentile Christian can, within the spirit of true repentance, condemn only himself. When he thinks of the sins of other sinners—which he naturally does and must do—if he is truly sorry for his own sins, he can only compare other sinners *favorably* with himself. With Paul, he can only say about sinners: "of whom I am chief." Confession of one's own responsibility for the death of Christ involves the recognition that one's guilt is infinite. Where this is recognized and acknowledged, how can the sin of another be regarded as *greater*? How can the Jew be regarded as "most" responsible?²⁷

So, we evangelicals must attest that the Gentile refusal of God's Messiah is equally as reprehensible as the rejection of Jesus by a twentieth-century Jew, except that, as God knows the conflicting emotions within the labyrinth of every psyche, He is aware, as we cannot be, of the next-to-invincible difficulty a Jew may experience in opening his heart to the claims of a Christ whose followers have caricatured him as a cruel sadist rather than a compassionate Savior.

Consider, in the third place, the appeal to theology as a ground for imposing a moratorium on the evangelization of Jews. For latterly, in the aftermath of Vatican II and with the increase of Jewish-Christian dialogue, not forgetting the continuing effect in the United States of a civil religion that labors to avoid sectarian offense, Catholic and Protestant scholars have pushed for a drastic revision of traditional Christology and *pari passu* the revision of traditional soteriology. Chief among these has been Rosemary Reuther whose controversial book, *Faith and Fratricide*, boldly raises this explosive issue: "Is it possible to say 'Jesus is Messiah' without, implicitly or explicitly, saying at the same time 'and the Jews be damned'?"²⁸ Here it is out of the question—neither is it my specific assignment—to examine her argument that the New Testament is anti-Judaic and thus latently anti-Semitic. Reuther's purpose, as stated by Thomas Indinopulos and Roy Bowen Ward, is to demonstrate that "the anti-Judaic root of Christianity cannot be torn out until the church's Christology is rid of its negation of the ongoing validity of the Jewish faith."²⁹

Ignoring her provisional and, even an evangelical may quite dispassionately report, unsuccessful venture at an acceptable non-Judaic reformulation of Christology, let us shift our attention to another Roman Catholic theologian, Gregory Baum, and notice how he has sought to accomplish the same objective. Himself of Jewish background, he too calls for a reconstruction of Christology that will eliminate its pathological anti-Semitism. He is confident that by "ideology critique" the revision can be accomplished. Bravely he blazes the trail which must be hewn out: "From the beginning, the Church preached the Christian message with an anti-Jewish ideology. When in later centuries,

the Church gained political influence and social power, the anti-Jewish ideology translated itself into legal structures that excluded the Jews, with the result that the Christian gospel in fact came to promote the oppression of a living people. Because the enslavement of human beings goes against the spirit and substance of the Gospel, it is possible, I hold to remove these ideological deformations from Christian teaching, however ancient and venerable they may be."³⁰

In the soul-scorching blaze of Auschwitz, which serves as "an altogether special sign of the times," Christianity, Baum contends, has no other option than penitent theological reconstructionism. "The Church is now summoned to a radical reformulation of its faith, free of ideological deformation, making God's act in Christ fully and without reserve a message for life rather than death." Speaking his mind more fully and specifically on this score, Baum declares: "There seems to be no reason why the Christian church, on the basis of the believing response to the Holocaust and a new Christian piety, should not be able to re-think and re-formulate the Christ-event in a way that retains Jesus unalterable as the source of God's judgment and new life for the believing community, but specifies that this dispensation of grace is only a prelude to the complete fulfillment of the messianic promises when God's will be done on earth in the new age."³¹

This, then, in one short sentence is how Baum hopes to engineer the recasting of traditional Christology: "Jesus is the Christ in an anticipatory way." The Baumian version of Christology "does not make Jesus the messiah of Israel who fulfills *all* the divine promises, who completes and closes the order of redemption and who is identified with God in such a way that there is no access to divinity through other dispensations. At the same time, such a christology, to remain in continuity with the Christian past, must clarify the pivotal place which Jesus holds in the history of salvation and the manner in which the absolute manifests itself in Jesus—that is to say, how it remains correct for Christians to say that God is substantially present in Jesus Christ."³²

This carries a corollary, as Baum unflinchingly admits: Jesus

is no longer *the* way to God, the only Savior apart from whom a redemptive relationship with the creator is impossible. Such exclusivism must be abandoned.

Reuther and Baum have an ally in Father John T. Pawlikowski, O.S.M., professor at the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago and chairman of the NCC Faith and Order Study Group on Israel. He finds fault with Paul's vision of the Jewish future sketched in Romans 9–11 because it "ultimately ends on a conversationist [*sic*: conversionist?] note that I find unacceptable." So, for him, "more radical surgery is imperative." In his judgment "parts of our traditional Christology [are] severely inadequate and should in fact be discarded. . . . as Christians we should come to view the Jewish 'no' to Jesus as a positive contribution to the ultimate salvation of mankind, not as an act of unfaithfulness or haughty blindness."

Pawlikowski is keenly conscious that his reformulated Christology "will profoundly alter Christianity's self-definition," but he is persuaded that it will "make possible a more realistic relationship to Judaism and to all other non-Christian religions."³³

"A profound alteration of Christianity's self-definition. . . . Profound indeed, so profound that an evangelical must apply to Pawlikowski's proposed reconstruction the strictures Indinopulos and Ward level against Reuther and, inferentially, Baum. This reformulation has so distanced itself from historic Christian belief that what is presented as "christological" will not "prove intelligible, much less acceptable to any of the recognizable branches of Christianity. . . . The implication of our author's Christological 'reinterpretation' is that in order for Christology to cease being anti-Semitic, it must cease being recognizable as Christology, that is, 'salvific.' To us, this appears as self-defeating—a case of stopping the disease by shooting the patient."³⁴

Which is why, Indinopulos and Ward warn the ecumenical advocates of reconstructionism, the "inherent contradiction" between the two divergent religions, Christianity and Judaism, cannot be overcome "without either the Christian quitting his faith or the Jew converting to Christianity."

We come back then, more or less full circle, to the problem of witness and conversion. Since Christianity, as evangelically construed, is of necessity evangelistic, can Christians earnestly share their faith with Jews and not come under censure for proselytizing? I think they can. As an evangelical, I draw a sharp distinction between proselytizing and witnessing, rejecting proselytism as a perversion of witness. As an evangelical, I am glad to have the Second Vatican Council voice not my mere sentiment but my strong conviction: "In spreading religious faith . . . everyone ought at all times to refrain from any manner of action which might seem to carry a kind of coercion or a kind of persuasion that would be dishonorable or unworthy, especially when dealing with poor or uneducated people. Such a manner of action would have to be considered an abuse of one's own right and a violation of the right of others."³⁵

As an evangelical, I also gladly endorse the editorial note appended to that Vatican II statement: "It is customary to distinguish between 'Christian witness' and proselytism and to condemn the latter. This distinction is made in the text here. Proselytism is a corruption of Christian witness by appealing to hidden forms of coercion or by a style of propaganda unworthy of the gospel. It is not the use but the abuse of religious freedom."³⁶ Moreover, as an evangelical, I gladly subscribe to the affirmation made by Tommaso Federici in his study outline for the Roman Catholic Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews.

The Church thus rejects in a clear way every form of proselytism. This means the exclusion of any sort of witness and preaching which in any way constitutes a physical, moral, psychological or cultural constraint on the Jews, both individuals and communities, such as might in any way destroy or even simply reduce their personal judgment, free will and full autonomy of decision. . . . Also excluded is every sort of judgment expressive of discrimination, contempt or restriction against the Jewish people as such . . . or against their faith, their worship, their general and in particular their religious culture, their past and present history, their existence and its meaning.³⁷

In addition, as an evangelical, I gladly countersign the emphatic repudiation of proselytism issued by the World Council of Churches: "Proselytism embraces whatever violates the right of the human person, Christian or non-Christian, to be free from external coercion in religious matters, or whatever, in the proclamation of the Gospel, does not conform to the ways God draws free men to himself in response to his calls to serve in spirit and in truth."³⁸

Still further, I, as an evangelical and as a human being who knows his own motives are never unmixed, appreciate James Megivern's helpful analysis in his article, "A Phenomenology of Proselytism." I realize, as he indicates, that three major dynamics seem to underlie the proselytizer's activity: first, the "necessary-for-salvation" motive; second, the "one-and-only-truth" motive; and third, the "obedience-to-a-divine-command" motive.³⁹

I realize likewise that operating dynamically in the proselytizer may be latent and "less exalted motives, with consequences that no respectable religion could ever want to justify"—a "domination-motive," an "insecurity-motive," and an "egocentric-motive."⁴⁰ But while keenly appreciative of the subtlety and strength of these perhaps unconscious dynamics, I do not draw from them or Megivern's other arguments a warrant for declaring "a moratorium on Christian missions as we have known them."⁴¹ Instead, I am constrained to view positively the three major motives which he mentions. Like my fellow-evangelicals I share the conviction that Christianity, as the flower and fulfillment of its Old Testament root, is the one-and-only truth, the solely salvific religion. Certainly we are not obtusely insensitive to the enormous problems inherent in that conviction. Neither are we obtusely insensitive to the difficulties which our truth-claim creates in intercreedal dialogue. Joseph A. Bracken rightly points out that, if a dialogue-partner holds such a conviction, he is not engaging in a mutual search for truth; he is covertly using dialogue "as an instrument to convert the others to one's own antecedent confessional viewpoint." "If one believes that one already has the truth and that truth of its very nature is incapable of change or development, then clearly one will engage in dialogue only up to a point, the point, mainly, when

one's antecedent beliefs would be called into question. . . . Ultimately, one's antecedent views on the nature of truth will dictate the manner of one's participation in a dialogue-situation, and the only honest thing to do in advance of actual participation is to decide where one stands on this prior issue."⁴²

Peter Berger is of the same opinion: "Dialogue between Jews and Christians (again, for perfectly understandable reasons) rarely deals with the truth claims of the two communities."⁴³ So interreligious discussion at this deep epistemological and philosophical level are mandatory to prevent dialogue from being a polite shadowboxing. But as long as we evangelicals remain convinced that by God's grace alone, not by virtue of our superior intellectual power, we do in fact possess the truth and thus know the solely salvific gospel, we are under obligation to share it. And now Megivern's other motive, obedience to a divine command, comes into play—in our case, obedience to our Lord's mandate, "Preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15). Only his mandate and our obedience may have as their motive a dynamic which Megivern does not mention though it is the master-motive in Christian theology, ethic, and mission—love.

"God is love," the New Testament proclaims, and motivated by love and nothing but love he has undertaken the whole process of creation and redemption in order to share the beatitude of his love with finite experients. We hear the message of that love which at an incalculable cost to himself God freely offers to all of us. (I read Abraham Heschel's moving exposition of Jehovah's pathos, his empathic identification with humanity and with Israel in particular; and in my heart the Johannine affirmation reverberates, "God is love.") Illuminated by God's Spirit, we respond in faith. And having experienced personally the wonder of his love, we are motivated to love him and, loving God, obey him. "If ye love me," Jesus said, "keep my commandments" (John 14:15). And one of his commandments is universal evangelism.

More than that, love for the God sacrificially self-revealed in Jesus Christ motivates love for all whom he loves. The inseparable linkage of love-for-God and love-for-neighbor is indicated

in these deceptively simple New Testament words: "We love him, because he first loved us. If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? And this commandment have we from him, that he who loveth God love his brother also" (I John 4:19-21).

And if love motivates us (though its motivating power is confessedly often weak, ineffectual, and short-circuited), we rejoice to share with our neighbors the best we have to give, and that best is the gospel of Jesus Christ. George A. F. Knight therefore speaks on behalf of all evangelicals when he, a sympathetic friend of Israel, writes: "There is one thing, and only one thing that we must communicate to all men, and that is Christ. To refrain from doing so . . . is a form of religious anti-Semitism which is as basically evil as the philosophy of the Nazis."⁴⁴

Thus in the end the problem is not *why* but *how*: as undeserving recipients of redemptive love how can we lovingly share the gospel with Jewish non-Christians? If we share it prayerfully, graciously, tactfully, honestly, sensitively, and non-coercively, we will not be guilty of the proselytizing that understandably disturbs Rabbi Balfour Brickner: "It is not the Gospel that is a threat to the Jews. The threat is from those who use the Gospel as a club to beat others into a brand of belief and submission with which they may disagree or find no need."⁴⁵

Our evangelism, if love-motivated and love-implemented, will fall within the category of witnessing approved by Rabbi Bernard Bamberger: "I see no reason why Christians should not try to convince us of their viewpoint, if they do so decently and courteously; and I believe that we Jews have the same right."⁴⁶

One might devoutly wish that he were a theological genius and a sociological wizard capable of undoing the Gordian knot of Jewish-Christian relations. But that tangle, I fear, will stay tied until, an evangelist might exclaim, the millennium has dawned. Meanwhile Reuther charts the path which we must follow with a measure of resignation and a capitulation to realism: "Possibly anti-Judaism is too deeply embedded in the foundations of Christianity to be rooted out entirely without

destroying the whole structure. We may have to settle for the sort of ecumenical goodwill that lives with theoretical inconsistency and opts for a *modus operandi* that assures practical cooperation between Christianity and Judaism."⁴⁷

Is that too modest an agreement? Or can an evangelicalism that intolerantly opposes any least anti-Semitic innuendo, carry on its evangelistic mission while cooperating ecumenically with its Jewish friends and neighbors? My hope, my prayer, is that it can.

Notes

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33. Quoted by Gerald Anderson, op. cit., pp. 284-85.

34. Indinopulos and Ward, op. cit., p. 205.

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43. Peter Berger, op. cit., p. 39.

44. Quoted by Martin A. Cohen, "The Mission of Israel After Auschwitz," Croner and Klenchi, op. cit., p. 178.

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B66AEEKI

ESSAYAEV

excellent!

Joseph B. Bustillos
MT 533: Theology of Religious Encounter
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Essay Review: Christianity and Judaism: Continuity and Discontinuity, by W. S. Campbell.

This may sound odd but this is the first essay that I have read for this course in which I was forced to read my Bible to keep up with the author's train of thought (even then, he lost me a few times). Primarily because of my former Dispensational background, the Continuity or Discontinuity between the Church and Israel is most interesting to me. In an atmosphere where all of the actions of the modern state of Israel were not only justified but Divinely justified because of Israel's "Chosen" status, it was always confusing to me how this integrated with the demand for repentance and acceptance of Jesus and his establishing of the Church (do we now have two "Peoples of God"?). I suppose because these people lacked any ethnic or cultural identity of their own, as born-again Christians they adopted the attitude that it was "cool" to be Jewish (even if that meant nothing more than occasionally wearing a "Yamakah" or singing Choruses with a "Jewish" flavor). The Church sure acts strange some times. *← understatement of the year!*

In his essay (getting back to the essay) Campbell quickly establishes that in the vagueness of its usage the word "Covenant" cannot be used to dichotomize the works of God in the Old Testament from the works then taking place (in the New Testament). If anything, the word only allows for an understanding of renewal or re-interpretation (so writes Campbell)¹. Thus Campbell feels that there is real continuity between the Church and Israel. The Church is not seen as the "New Israel" and therefore replacing the "Old Israel" but (as Madison Avenue would say) the Church is the "super-duper new improved Israel!" (same old product in a new package). It may be a fulfillment or clarification or "better than" but it is not a "replacement for." Campbell's exegesis of Romans points out the closeness between the Church and Israel. "Gentile Christianity can never be complete by itself: Paul describes it as a branch dependent on the Jewish Christian root"².

At the same time Campbell points out that there is real discontinuity between Israel and the Church (I wish these guys would make up my mind³). Using the Apostle Paul as a paradigm for understanding Jewish-Christian Continuity-Discontinuity Campbell, quoting W.D. Davies, points out that "a proper understanding of Paul's attitude to the law [Old Covenant] is attained only in the light of his understanding of Jesus as Messiah."⁴ The basis for Paul's "new Covenant" is the revelation of Jesus Christ and the explosion of his previous understanding of Judaism. It's not the "Faith of our Fathers" that was toppled on the Damascus Road but Paul's understanding and practice of it. It was the "New Covenant" now written on his heart.

The relationship between Judaism and Christianity is therefore seen as being unique. It is (to use Paul's analogy in Galatians) as if Judaism and Christianity are two brothers of different mothers (and Judaism is the older brother). This is not to say that the Jews do not need to be "converted" to Christ but that, perhaps, their conversion is one of fulfillment and not necessarily of change. ✓

I enjoyed reading this essay and the gist of his thought seems to fit my own theology well. ✓

FOOTNOTES

¹ *de* I'm sure many Covenant Theologians took him to task for his unthroning of the term. ✓

² p. 57, Gentile Christianity for the most part now being the Church (sad but true).

³ I'm being facetious about this. I can appreciate a good paradox as well as the next guy.

⁴ p. 56. ✓

Christianity and Judaism: Continuity and Discontinuity

W. S. Campbell

The relationship between Christianity and Judaism is a vast theme. Some of the most significant developments affecting the relationship have originated from historical events such as the Jewish-Roman war and the eventual destruction of Jerusalem; the Holocaust is a more recent example. In this study we shall confine ourselves to theological issues in three key topics: covenant, Paul's conversion-call, and the use of the title "Israel." The aim is to demonstrate that continuity as well as discontinuity between Christianity and Judaism is basic to the New Testament understanding of all three.

New Covenant or Renewed Covenant?

The ambiguity concerning the understanding of "covenant" in the New Testament is illustrated by the variation both in the meaning and in the frequency of the term. Of the thirty-three occurrences, eight are in the undisputed letters of Paul, seventeen are in Hebrews, with four occurrences in Luke/Acts, and one each in Mark, Matthew, Ephesians, and Revelation.

Paul first uses the adjective new (*kainē*) in connection with covenant (*diathēkē*) in the reference in 1 Corinthians 11:25 to the institution of the Lord's Supper. Mark simply refers to "my blood of the covenant" (14:24). In the earliest and best manuscripts of Matthew and Mark, "new" is not included. Luke 22:17-20 includes two traditions—a shorter one that does not mention "covenant" at all, and a longer one that mentions "the new covenant." The sole reference to "the old covenant" is found in 2 Corinthians 3:14 where Paul speaks of reading the old covenant. It is probable that behind the references to "new covenant" in the New Testament is the passage in Jeremiah 31:31-34 where the prophet says, "Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah." The significant feature of this covenant, which will distinguish it from that

made at the exodus, is that the Lord will put his law within them: "I will write it upon their hearts." If Jesus did actually use the phrase "new covenant," probably he had this prophecy in mind.

"Covenant" in Hebrews

This epistle cites the Jeremiah passage in full (from the Septuagint) in Hebrews 8:8-12. The author has more than one meaning for the word *diathēkē*; he can use it as meaning a "testament," associated with the death of the testator (9:16f.). Hebrews offers a clear contrast between the old and the new, but, unlike Paul or Jeremiah, its author finds the essence of the two *diathēkai* in the cultic aspect. This approach is doubtless to be understood in light of the purpose and the audience for which the document was originally written. The interpretation of Hebrews will differ depending on whether the author is seen as contrasting Christian faith with Judaism or with some Jewish-Gnostic heresy.

In his recent *Introduction to the New Testament*, H. Koester suggests that the author of Hebrews, addressing the whole Christian church, enters into a critical theological controversy with Gnosticism by refuting the Gnostic understanding of both the redeemer and the process of salvation by means of a Christological and ecclesiological interpretation of Scripture.¹ In his commentary on Hebrews, Robert Jewett notes the close parallels between Colossians and Hebrews; the key argument in both is that Christ has overcome the elemental forces of the universe. He takes up the proposal of Charles P. Anderson that the lost Laodicean letter, written probably by Epaphras, is in fact the Epistle to the Hebrews (cf. Col. 4:16).²

The fact that the most recent scholarship considers the purpose of Hebrews as being essentially to oppose a Jewish-Gnostic type of heresy means that we must be extremely careful not to read this letter simply as a stark contrast between Judaism ("the old") and Christianity ("the new") as symbolized by two distinct covenants. Koester in fact warns that parts of Hebrews may be completely misunderstood if the letter is interpreted as a criticism of the Jewish cult. He states: "To be sure, the material and temporal limitations of the sacrificial cult are pointed out (9:9-10), but the actual point of the argument as a whole is to prove that the

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heavenly reality of the path that the redeemer took led through his death; only for that reason does the new covenant stand (9:15-17). The author does not argue against Judaism, but against the gnostic devaluation of the salvatory significance of Jesus' death."³

The Particularity of the Pauline Epistles

To interpret Paul's letters as abstract and timeless theological treatises, as if they had originated in a historical vacuum, is entirely to misunderstand them. It is clear that the major and undisputed letters are addressed to individual churches about specific problems encountered at a particular period in their history. The genius of Paul is that he was able to write coherent and consistent theology while translating it into the contingent particularities of each local church.

Thus the theology of the cross, Paul's unique apocalyptic interpretation of the death and resurrection of Jesus, constitutes the dogmatic center and core of his gospel.⁴ But this is continuously reinterpreted and restated to relate to differing local problems. To understand Paul aright is not merely to take note of what he has written but to interpret his written words in the context out of which they arise and to which they are addressed. Thus in acknowledging Paul to be a consistent theologian, we still insist on distinguishing him from the systematic theologian. Often the failure to interpret Paul historically as well as theologically has resulted in gross exaggeration of Paul's views, especially on the theme of Judaism.

"Covenant" in Paul

Paul, as we have already noted, refers to "the new covenant" in 1 Corinthians 11:25. In 2 Corinthians 3:6 he also refers to apostles being qualified "to be ministers of a new covenant, not in a written code but in the Spirit." There is a reference to two covenants in Galatians, but the references in Romans—"to them belong . . . the covenants" (9:4) and "this will be my covenant with them" (11:27)—present a more positive understanding of God's covenantal relationship with Israel. The problem with most of these references is that very often they are incidental or secondary to the main theme in hand. Nowhere do we have as a central theme in any of Paul's letters a stark contrast between Christianity and Judaism in terms of old and new covenant. Paul does not think so much in terms of static abrogation—of the replacement of one covenant by another—but rather, in terms of dynamic transformation. Thus Christ is the *telos*, or goal, of the law rather than its termination (Rom. 10:4).⁵ It would seem unwarranted therefore to make the allegorical reference to two covenants in Galatians the basis for an important New Testament doctrine. In any case Paul does not use the terms "old" and "new" here. This is doubtless because both covenants are in fact traced back to the figure of Abraham. Again the reference in 1 Corinthians 11:25, though unambiguous, has no immediate contrast with Judaism in its context.

The unique reference to "the old covenant" in 2 Corinthians 3:14 is more problematical. But the actual theme is a contrast between forms of ministry, which itself originates from a reference to the Corinthians as Paul's letter of recommendation, "a letter from Christ . . . written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts" (2 Cor. 3:3). This contrast reminds us of a basic contrast that Paul sometimes uses, between the "outward" and "inward" Jew (Rom. 2:28f.), and between the spirit and the letter (Rom. 7:6).

Part of the problem of 2 Corinthians is that we are unclear as to the identity of Paul's opponents. Both Ernst Käsemann⁶ and

Dieter Georgi⁷ hold that Paul may have a polemical intention in this passage, which may be directed against Jewish or Jewish-Christian opponents. C. K. Barrett considers that these opponents regarded themselves as preeminent Christian apostles. They carried letters of authority from Jerusalem but they refused to recognize Paul's apostolic status. They also accommodated themselves to the Hellenistic or gnosticizing criteria employed by the Gentile Christians in Corinth.⁸

Moreover, there is a real possibility that Paul is here making use of his opponents' slogans and reversing their opinion that spirit and letter are directly linked in the interpretation of the Old Testament. Perhaps this is one reason why Paul takes up a pre-Pauline midrash on Exodus 34:30.⁹ For a clear understanding of 2 Corinthians 3-4, we require a more precise knowledge of the beliefs of Paul's opponents and also of the first-century midrashic understanding of Exodus 34. Only then can we base important doctrines upon it. In any case we cannot agree with Käsemann's conclusion in his essay "The Spirit and the Letter," that "the phenomenon of the true Jew is eschatologically realized in the Christian who has freed himself from Judaism."¹⁰

Käsemann does warn against any absolute identification of the Old Testament as letter or any simplistic depreciation of the law simply because it was written down. He points out that behind the reference to "written . . . with the Spirit . . . on tablets of human hearts" lies an assertion of the fulfillment of Jeremiah 31:33, and that Paul has in mind here both the reference to stone tablets and the contrast of Ezekiel 11:9 and 36:26 where Israel's stony heart is to be replaced by a heart of flesh. The implication is that the new covenant of which Jeremiah speaks has become a reality. Käsemann, however, sees here two contrasting covenants so that Paul "has to decide between the old and the new covenants, instead of seeing both as a historical continuity in the light of the concept of the renewed covenant."¹¹

Announcing

The next meeting of the International Association for Mission Studies will be held at the University of Zimbabwe, in Harare, January 8-14, 1985, on the theme "Christian Mission and Human Transformation." Further details about the program will be sent to members in the near future. Inquiries about membership and activities of the Association may be sent to the General Secretary of IAMS, Rapenburg 61, 2311 GJ Leiden, The Netherlands.

Despite the fact that, in his recent book *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, E. P. Sanders deplores the implicit anti-Judaism in much German Pauline scholarship earlier in this century, he himself concludes that Paul's religion is far removed from the covenantal nomism that essentially constituted Palestinian Judaism. He concludes that the idea of the covenant was not a central one for Paul, for whom "participation in Christ," a way of salvation that by definition excludes all others, was basic.¹² Sanders goes on to argue that "Paul in fact explicitly denies that the Jewish covenant can be effective for salvation." In an essay on "Paul and Covenantal Nomism," Morna Hooker points out that Sanders is correct only if by "Jewish covenant" he means the covenant on Mount Sinai, which Paul regards as an interim measure until the promises are fulfilled. While allowing that it may be pure chance that Paul never describes God's promise to Abraham as a "covenant," Hooker sug-

gests that this may be because Paul prefers to speak of it in terms of promise, and to use the term "covenant" for what happens in Christ.¹³ God's promises to Abraham relate to the future and it is 'y in Christ that the promised blessing becomes effective.

W. D. Davies has drawn attention to the fact that the word "new" can be used both of Jeremiah's new covenant and also of the new moon. He writes:

The ministry of the old covenant, and by implication the old covenant itself, had its glory (2 Cor. 3:7). Moreover, just as the new covenant conceived by Jeremiah, Jubilees and the sectarians at Qumran did not unambiguously envisage a radical break with the Sinaitic covenant but a re-interpretation, so Paul's new covenant. Thus Jer. 31:33 does not look forward to a new law but to "my law," God's sure law, being given and comprehended in a new way. The adjective "*h'dasah*" in Jer. 31:33, translated "*kainē*" by Paul, can be applied to the new moon, which is simply the old moon in a new light. The new covenant of Paul, as of Jeremiah, finally offers re-interpretation of the old.¹⁴

This conclusion concerning the meaning of covenant in Paul should not be regarded as confusing Judaism and Christianity. We are not advocating any theory of two covenants—whether it is one in absolute contrast to the other, as Käsemann suggests, or two covenants for two distinct peoples, as some modern scholars propose. Rather, the object of our study has been to emphasize that there is real continuity between Judaism and Christianity.

If we minimize the differences between these, we fail to account adequately for the origin of Christianity, though we do thereby acknowledge God's revelation of himself in Judaism. Alternatively, if we exaggerate the element of discontinuity, we can then stress the uniqueness of the Christian revelation at the expense of calling into question the faithfulness of God. For if one covenant can fail, so too can another; moreover, if Christianity

"If one covenant can fail, so too can another."

claims to be an absolutely new revelation of God, how then do we see ourselves in relation to Islam, or to any subsequent religion appearing on the stage of history?

Käsemann claims that whereas Abraham is, for Paul, a prototype of the Christ, Moses is the antitype.¹⁵ If we accept this designation, it would appear that in relation to Moses and Sinai, Paul would speak of a *new* covenant. But if Abraham is a true prototype, then surely we must speak in terms of a "renewed" covenant, in terms of fulfillment and affirmation, rather than purely in terms of stark contrast.

Paul's Conversion-Call

W. D. Davies has long insisted that a proper understanding of Paul's attitude to the law is attained only in the light of his understanding of Jesus as Messiah.¹⁶ Whatever else is in dispute concerning Paul's Damascus experience, one thing is clear: it involved a messianic or Christological content. Krister Stendahl argues that proper interpretation of Romans 7 shows that Paul, as a loyal Jew, had experienced no struggle or guilt feelings that would have led him, through dissatisfaction with the law, to turn to Christ. Paul's concern, as distinct from that of Luther, was not "How can I find a gracious God?" Neither did he suffer from an introspective

conscience. Instead of speaking of Paul's conversion, Stendahl prefers to regard him as someone who did not abandon his Jewishness for a new religion but, rather, as a Jew who was given a new vocation in service of the Gentiles.¹⁷

R. P. Martin agrees that Paul as a Jew was probably not consumed with guilt and inner conflicts. But Martin takes issue with Stendahl because Stendahl fails to note that the intermediate term between Paul the persecutor and Paul the apostle is Christ himself. "The central link acting as a hinge to connect the old and the new for Paul, was a *revelation of Christ in his glory as the image of God*." It is the Christological dimension of Paul's conversion, strangely missing from Stendahl's exposition, which for Martin turns out to be the indispensable factor in explaining it.¹⁸ We believe that Martin is correct in this emphasis and that Paul's attitude to the law is more intelligible in the light of it. Paul's reassessment of the law resulted from the revelation of Jesus Christ. As Davies notes, "To isolate the criticism of the Law from the total messianic situation, as Paul conceived it, is both to exaggerate and emasculate it. The criticism of the Law was derivative, a consequence of the ultimate place Paul ascribed to Jesus as Messiah."¹⁹

E. P. Sanders has recently drawn attention to the fact that, since the Reformation, there has been a tendency to read back the struggles of the sixteenth century into Paul's experience and theology. He deplores the tendency to caricature Judaism as a "religion of works." We agree with him and with W. D. Davies that the precedence of grace over law in Israelite religion persisted, despite some neglect, in Judaism.²⁰ In deference to Sanders it should be acknowledged that the boasting that Paul opposes is perhaps better understood as the making of claims rather than as the achievement of good works. This making of claims consisted in regarding the mere possession of the law as a badge of election. But for Paul the recognition of Jesus as Messiah, and its corollary—the admission of Gentiles as Gentiles—means that such a view of the law is precluded.

Yet even the assertion that Jesus is Messiah was not for Paul tantamount to a rejection of Judaism, or the founding of an entirely new religion but, rather, expressed the profound conviction that the final expression and intent of Judaism had been born. For this reason we believe that it is inadequate to speak only in terms of Paul's conversion—as if he were moving from one religion to another; and likewise only in terms of his call—as if he were continuing in an unaltered faith. The conversion-call combination emphasizes both continuity and change.

Paul and the Israel of God (Gal. 6:16)

Peter Richardson has maintained that the designation of the church as "the new Israel" did not occur until the time of Justin. It was only by A.D. 160 that the church was identified with the "Israel of God."²¹ His thesis has yet to be disproved. Though there may be signs in the New Testament of an implicit adaption and application of titles and roles that point already in the direction of this identification, there is not so much *explicit* evidence as one might expect. Thus in Hebrews, even though the concept of Christians as the "Israel of God" underlies much in the letter, yet this is never actually explicitly expressed.

We need to distinguish clearly between those features that point to Gentile Christians as elect or as now being included within the people of God, and those that might tend toward the idea of the displacement of Israel by the Christian church. Galatians 6:16 might possibly qualify as an explicit identification of the church with "the Israel of God." The Revised Standard version renders it: "Peace and mercy be upon all who walk by this rule, upon the Is-

rael of God." This might be taken to mean that the latter phrase is simply in opposition to the former and that Paul's benediction is applied to all those Christians, who, like him, regard circumcision as essential. This would also mean that Paul, already at this period in history, identifies the Christian church as "the Israel of God" in opposition to the historical people Israel. This interpretation is unlikely for several reasons. Although Paul does distinguish between Abraham's two sons—one is born "according to the flesh" and the other "through promise" (Gal. 4:22f.)—his main aim is not to show a contrast between the Israel of God and fleshly Israel (*Israel kata sarka*). He writes to discourage Gentile Christians from accepting circumcision and (possibly) the bondage of keeping the whole law. Paul asserts that Jesus became accursed so that "in Christ Jesus" the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles (3:14). But there is no suggestion that the inclusion of Gentiles necessarily involves the exclusion of Jews. Moreover, since apart from Galatians 6:16 there is no other evidence until A.D. 160 for the explicit identification of the church as "the true Israel," this isolated instance would be hard to explain by itself. Why was it that no one in the next hundred years used this verse to identify the church as "the new Israel" if it was accepted that Paul had in fact already done so? It is better to take Peter Richardson's translation as indicating the proper sense in which this verse should be understood: "May God give peace to all who will walk according to this criterion, and mercy also to his faithful people Israel."²² Thus Paul's benediction also includes the faithful in Israel, although this group is not coextensive with "all Israel." The New English Bible translation offers a similar understanding: "whoever they are who take this principle for their guide, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the whole Israel of God." Our approach to Galatians 6:16 is naturally been colored by the meaning of "Israel" in Romans 1 and it is to this that we must now turn.

Paul and Israel in Romans 9–11: Paul Opposes Anti-Judaism within the Christian Community

In the interests of clarity and brevity, we shall set out in note form the main emphases of these chapters.

a) What Paul acknowledges:

1. The continuing rejection of the gospel by the majority of Jews (9:30–10:3).
2. The influx of a large number of believing Gentiles (9:30).
3. The reason for Israel's failure—an unenlightened zeal (10:2). Christ, or possibly the law itself,²³ has become a stumbling stone to the Jews (9:33).

b) What Paul affirms:

1. His deep personal concern for his fellow Jews (9:1–3; 10:1).
2. The abiding election privileges of the Jews—"they are Israelites . . . to them belong the sonship," etc. (9:4–5).
3. The freedom of God in election—it depends only upon God's mercy (9:15); God is free to admit Gentiles and to retain Jews within his purpose as he wills.
4. No one, and especially not the Jews, is beyond the reach of the gospel call (10:12).
5. God has the power to graft in again those now disobedient (11:23).
6. The unbelieving Jews, though now "enemies of God as regards the Gospel," are still beloved by him for the sake of the patriarchs (11:28).
7. The gifts and call of God are irrevocable (11:29).

c) What Paul denies:

1. That the word, i.e., promises of God, has failed: there is a remnant chosen by grace although not all descended from Israel belong to Israel (9:6).

2. That God is arbitrary or unjust: he is both free and compassionate (9:15).
3. That God has rejected his own people: Paul and the remnant prove this not so (11:1–5).
4. That God has destined Israel to ultimate rejection: God overruled their unbelief for the good of the Gentiles and Israel remains central in God's plan (11:11–16).

d) What Paul warns against:

1. Gentile Christians must not boast over unbelieving Jews (11:17f.).
2. Gentile Christians must not forget that it is the (Jewish) root that supports them; branches of themselves are not a tree—they share the richness of the olive tree (11:17f.).

"Gentile Christianity can never be complete by itself."

3. Gentile Christians must not become proud or presumptuous but must stand in faith and awe (11:20).
4. Gentile Christians must not presume to know the mind of the Lord; they are not to become "wise in their own conceits", since Israel's hardening is only partial and temporary (11:25f.).

e) What Paul hopes for:

1. That the success of his ministry among Gentiles will lead to some Jews being saved (11:14).
2. That the eventual outcome of the Gentile mission will be that the Jews will be provoked to obedience, so that "all Israel will be saved" (11:11, 25f.).
3. That Gentile Christians, Jewish Christians, and Jews will realize that they are inseparably linked through God's saving purpose for the world (11:28–32).

From this review we can see that Paul opposed the proud Gentile Christians by refusing to allow any absolute separation between the church and Israel.²⁴ This is not surprising because it is unlikely that the church existed as a completely separate entity before A.D. 70. Gentile Christianity can never be complete by itself: Paul describes it as a branch dependent on the Jewish Christian root. By this he hoped to prevent the dissociation of Gentile Christians from their Jewish roots, and possibly also from Jerusalem to which he was about to set out with the collection; this collection was intended to help bind together the two wings of the church.

It is likely that Paul wanted the Roman Gentile Christians to see both the ministry of Christ and his own ministry as examples for them to follow. In Romans 15:8 Paul states that Christ has become (*gegenēsthai*) a servant (*diakonos*) to the Jewish people. J. Koenig suggests that the natural and proper meaning of this perfect-tense verb is that Christ has become, and still is, a servant or minister to the Jewish people, namely, that Paul has the ongoing postresurrection effect of Christ's servanthood in mind and is not merely thinking of his life and death.²⁵ The Gentile Christians may have concluded wrongly that Paul's Gentile mission signified that he had given up hope for Israel. Koenig argues that Paul is really still aiming to influence Israel by making them jealous (11:11f.). This means that both Paul's ministry and that of Jesus may be described as having Jews and Gentiles in view; cf. 15:8 where Christ is described as a minister of the circumcision to confirm the promises to Jews, and that Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. If Paul and Jesus desired the salvation of both Jew and Gentile, then it

would follow that the Roman Christians should not see their salvation as separate from the destiny of Israel. The solidarity of both Jew and Gentile in salvation is what Paul intends to stress. This emphasis is relevant to our contemporary scene and it is to this that we must now turn.

The Relationship between Christians and Jews Today

We have found from our study of covenant, Paul's conversion-call, and the title "Israel" in the New Testament that there is evidence of both continuity and discontinuity between Christianity and Judaism. We have suggested that in the past there has sometimes existed a tendency among New Testament scholars to depreciate Judaism. Although we do not wish to promote an exaggerated reaction in the contrary direction, we believe that it is now time for a balanced but positive appreciation of Christianity's continuing debt to Judaism, and for an end to all implicit anti-Judaism within Christianity.

This will not mean that Christians will cease to witness to Jews. Witness and dialogue are demanded not because Jews are either similar to Christians or differ radically from them, but because it is the Christian's duty to witness to all persons simply because this is of the essence of being in Christ. Any serious-minded Christian will seek to know and understand those with whom we are in dialogue—but especially our Jewish neighbors with whom we have a special bond in a shared history and Scripture. In this we disagree with Stendahl's view that it dawned on Paul that the Jesus movement is to be "a Gentile movement—God being allowed to establish Israel in his own time and place!" Stendahl finds it significant that Paul omits the name of Jesus Christ from the whole section of Romans 10:17–11:36.²⁶ We think Stendahl makes too much of this argument from silence. Paul *does* speak of seeking to save some of the Jews through his Gentile mission

(11:14). The reference to "the deliverer" in 11:26 can legitimately be taken to refer to Christ. Also the form of argument of 11:12–24 can most naturally be located within the normal scope of Pauline eschatology, that is, the "how much more" is based on the surpassing grace of Christ's redemptive work. Even the concluding doxology is implicitly Christological.²⁷

We oppose any view of Christianity and Judaism that proposes a theory of purely separate development. If we have read Paul aright, he has stressed the continuity of divine revelation and the resulting need for solidarity even when, because of disobedience on *either* side, there may be wide differences between Christians and Jews. The problem of leaving "the salvation of all Israel" until the final consummation of human history is that this view suggests that in the meantime Jews and Christians can lead a separate existence.

We agree with Thomas Torrance that the relation of the Christian church and its mission to Israel must be quite unlike that to any other people or religion. But we are unhappy when he claims that "the gospel can hardly be brought to Israel, for it derives from Israel. . . . Jews cannot be treated by Christians as unbelievers but only as brother believers with whom they are privileged to share a common faith in God and the same promises of salvation."²⁸ Torrance stresses so much the commonality of our heritage—the continuity between Christianity and Judaism—that he has omitted the element of discontinuity and so slurs the genuine distinction that actually exists between them. Because of the element of discontinuity between Christianity and Judaism, there will inevitably be some tension between them. But it is part of genuine Christian witness to ensure that there is no more tension than our theological differences demand. Above all we shall witness remembering with sadness those shameful events of Christian history in relation to Jews from which none of us can entirely exculpate ourselves.

Notes

1. H. Koester, *Introduction to the New Testament*, 2 vols.; vol. 2, *History and Literature of Early Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), pp. 274f.
2. R. Jewett, *Letter to Pilgrims* (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1981), pp. 5–8.
3. H. Koester, *Early Christianity*, pp. 274f.
4. Cf. J. C. Beker, *Paul the Apostle* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), pp. 178f., 208.
5. See Paul Meyer's criticism of Käsemann's inconsistency in not keeping to his own "dialectical" interpretation of Paul: "Rom. 10:4 and the End of the Law," in *The Divine Helmsman*, ed. J. L. Crenshaw and S. Sandmel (New York: Ktav, 1980) pp. 59f.
6. Cf. Käsemann, "The Spirit and the Letter," in *Perspectives on Paul* (London: SCM, 1971), p. 151.
7. Georgi, *Die Gegner des Paulus im 2 Korintherbrief* (Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag, 1964), pp. 252f.
8. Barrett, *A Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (London: SPCK, 1973), pp. 28f.
9. Cf. Georgi, *Die Gegner des Paulus*, pp. 268–72.
10. Käsemann, "The Spirit and the Letter," p. 146.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 154.
12. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (London: SCM, 1977); see especially pp. 511–15, 543f. Unfortunately, Sanders' most recent work, *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), in which he elaborates some of the points referred to in the present article, was not available until after this article was written.
13. Hooker, in *Paul and Paulinism: Essays in Honour of C. K. Barrett*, ed. M. D. Hooker and S. G. Wilson (London: SPCK, 1982), pp. 47–56.
14. W. D. Davies, "Paul and the People of Israel," *New Testament Studies* 24 (1978): 11.
15. Cf. Käsemann, "Paul and Israel," in *New Testament Questions of Today* (London: SCM, 1969), p. 185.
16. Cf. W. D. Davies, "Paul and the Law," in *Paul and Paulinism*, ed. Hooker and Wilson, pp. 7f.
17. Stendahl, *Paul among Jews and Gentiles* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), pp. 4f., 132.
18. Martin, *Reconciliation: A Study of Paul's Theology* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981), pp. 26f.
19. Davies, "Paul and the Law," p. 7.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 5.
21. Richardson, *Israel and the Apostolic Church* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1969).
22. *Ibid.*, p. 84.
23. Cf. Paul Meyer, "Rom. 10:4," pp. 64f.
24. Cf. W. S. Campbell, "The Freedom and the Faithfulness of God in Relation to Israel," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 13 (1981): 27–45.
25. Koenig, "The Jewishness of the Gospel," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 19 (1982): 66.
26. Stendahl, *Paul among Jews and Gentiles*, p. 4.
27. On this, see W. S. Campbell, "Salvation for Jews and Gentiles: K. Stendahl and Paul's Letter to the Romans," in *Studia Biblica* III (1978), *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*, Supplement Series 3 (Sheffield, 1980), pp. 65–72.
28. Thomas Torrance, in *The Witness of the Jews to God*, ed. David W. Torrance (Edinburgh: Handsel Press, 1982), pp. 139–40.

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Essay Review: A Paradigm Shift? Evangelicals and Interreligious Dialogue, by AFG

This essay actually seems to be two essays. The first one deals with the question of what the Evangelical's approach to Dialogue should be. The second question deals with the problem of Pluralism within Christianity itself. In discussing the commonly used approaches to dialogue I loved the fact that the unfeasibility of divorcing religions from the people that follow them was pointed out:

It needs to be constantly stressed that each religious system is a complex world of its own, and anthropologists keep telling us how exceedingly difficult it is to separate religion from the general culture of the people who embrace it postulates. (p. 395)

This being the case, we must meet them where they are and dialogue with them if we are to share the gospel with the non-Christian world. We cannot know how Christ wishes to work in their lives and bring them to salvation, unless we live with them long enough to hear them and understand their problems.

The disappointing thing about this endeavor is that the spectrum of Christendom seems to have forgotten the biblical roots from which it was born and therefore cannot engage in dialogue in real unity. The non-Christian world is presently forced to dealing many Christianities and not just one. This leads to the discussion regarding the paradigms of truth.

2, | The paradigm motif works only if one remembers that we are dealing with accepted truth and the idea that any that truth that is brought into this world must be conceived and delivered by fragile and fallible humankind. While the paradigm motif does point out the gradual shift in understanding evangelism, it suffers from the possibility being understood as advocating a sort of relativity in reference to truth.

A Paradigm Shift? Evangelicals and Interreligious Dialogue

EDITORIAL

RELIGIOUS ENCOUNTER is a crucial issue for the worldwide Christian movement today. Some major religions like Islam are in resurgence. Others have been deeply undermined by hostile governments as Holmes Welch points out in a significant article on Buddhism in China today (1979:119-137). There are those struggling to adapt to the contemporary world — witness the efforts of Sri Radhakrishnan, who called Hindus to strike out on more courageous lines of advance in religious reform, building on the foundations of the Vedanta (Devanandan 1954:132ff). Some religions seek to disassociate themselves from former otherworldly mysticisms and get caught up in the universal concern of war-weary humanity struggling for world community and social justice. When leaders participate in interreligious dialogue, the dominant note is: "We are alike despite our differences. We all seek to give meaning to our common humanity. We are all striving to affirm the worth of human values" (Devanandan 1960:221). The last two decades of the 20th century may well find interreligious cooperation growing throughout the world.

Still, all religions are in polemic opposition to Christian missions — even though they bear marks, in Latourette's phrase, of "mass modification" resulting from protracted contact with mission vigor throughout the modern era. Hendrik Kraemer agrees: "The great non-Christian religions have utilized the permeation of Christian ideas and ideals for their own internal and external strengthening" (1969:291). Understandably, this indebtedness has not been acknowledged!

In the years immediately ahead, these religions will doubtless display mounting hostility toward that segment of the church

committed to the priority of beseeching people everywhere on behalf of Christ to be reconciled to God (2 Co 5:20). Evangelism will increasingly be denigrated as proselytism, and church planting slandered as religious imperialism.

In the face of this prospect — the growing triad of unacknowledged indebtedness, hostility toward conversion-oriented evangelism, and interreligious cooperation — we approach the issue: What constitutes a valid evangelical perspective on interreligious dialogue?

What Are the Options?

Many feel that evangelicals are incapable of discussing the options objectively — they too readily resort to dogmatic defensiveness. The reasoning is: those who feel they must bear gospel witness to all with the avowed intention of pressing everyone to embrace Jesus Christ, become his disciple and through baptism enter his church, must be negative when assessing non-Christian religions and non-Christians. Whereas they might be able to cooperate heartily with them in matters of humanitarian service and in the struggle for social justice — assuming they are free to name the name of Jesus Christ (Col 3:17) — when it comes to interreligious encounter they cannot rise to the demands of "reverence for reverence," scientific accuracy and intellectual honesty.

Today evangelicals are increasingly seeking to take these criticisms seriously (e.g. Hesselgrave 1978; Stott 1975). True, relatively few evangelical theologians have tackled this complicated subject. Few appear to have the breadth of missionary vision to sense its desperate importance to the worldwide missionary movement or the hopeless inadequacy, from a missionary point of view, of the historic creeds whose exposition and defense have always been the evangelical priority. Besides, the more knowledgeable might ask, "What is the point in discussing the validity of interreligious dialogue? Everyone knows what the options are." But what are "the options"? Over the years scholars have sought — rather simplistically, it seems to me — to reduce them to sharply-defined "approaches". They have identified at least two distinct groups based upon common presuppositions.

The first group of approaches include *radical displacement*: Christianity with all its Western cultural baggage is transplanted

whole, and the ethnic religion is brushed aside as valueless; *discontinuity*: the uniqueness and superiority of Christianity are assumed with no real point of contact to the other religion, yet it seeks to adapt itself to the cultural forms of the people; and *unique yet unequal*: each religion is recognized as a respected unity where comparisons are possible when honestly made at levels of belief and practice, but Christianity remains "obviously superior". These first three approaches differ in degree rather than in kind.

The second group differ more in kind — *legitimate borrowing*: since it is granted that points of contact between all religions are many due to the commonality of their human dimensions, to be truly indigenous Christianity should borrow freely from them; *fulfillment*: the gospel is deliberately related to all other religions, either literally, as in the New Testament fulfillment of the Old Testament, or in realizing the highest aspirations one finds either expressed or intimated in the scriptures of other religions; and *relativistic syncretism*: every religion — Christianity included — represents the spiritual quest of people seeking God, so one takes the best in each and finds the truth latent in all and through religious encounter and dialogue, everyone's faith is enlarged and enriched in an ongoing movement toward Ultimate Truth.

These somewhat simplistic classifications are tenable only if one overlooks the nuances of the Bible and has only limited knowledge of the non-Christian religions. It posits the uncritical assumption of a capacity for objectivity and dismisses too easily the ability we have to be overly subjective in our evaluations of what a religion's allegiance means to its actual devotees. Then, too, no one is capable of truly understanding the ancient testimonies of the various religions and their scriptures. Our own cultural bias is so strong that we interpret them today in terms that may be far removed from their original import. It needs to be constantly stressed that each religious system is a complex world of its own, and anthropologists keep telling us how exceedingly difficult it is to separate religion from the general culture of the people who embrace its postulates.

Furthermore, each religious system is cluttered with denominational differences, and who is to say which one is normative? Whereas separate schools of thought can be compared and contrasted, all of us are brought to a full stop

when we ask the same questions of Christianity. For in a sense we cannot focus just on the gospel and deliberately overlook the pluriform nature of the human response to the worldwide Christian movement. Barth sought to make a sharp distinction between the "revelation of God" and "the Christian religion." For a season, many of us enjoyed this dichotomy; but we now know that we cannot apprehend Revelation without the human reaction. The Bible describes these two in terms of interaction within specific cultures and does not concentrate on the development of supracultural "theological" propositions. Indeed, there are those like Chakkari who argue that unless Christians are willing to expose their churches-human witnesses to Revelation — to empirical investigation and evaluation, they have no right to involve themselves in evangelistic activity (Bosch 1977:162).

What then? We refuse to reiterate the older pattern of defining Christianity vis-à-vis the other religions. And we feel the religions of the world should not be rejected out of hand. This is neither fair nor respectful of the truth they contain.

Even so, I find no evangelical support for the thesis that one should see these religions as the sublime expressions of human nobility and creativity. Even secular anthropologists no longer hold this position. In the formative years of their crusade for cultural relativism some argued that the religious system of each culture seemed adequate and met the needs of its people, but no longer. More often they heed Goldschmidt's call for "comparative functionalism" and argue that he is closer to reality (and to the Bible!) when he affirms:

There are enough instances on record of primitive peoples not being happy in their own customs but like many a married couple not knowing how to escape them . . . so that we, too, should begin to understand the phenomenon of distinction and establish relevant criteria for functional efficiency . . . we must rid ourselves of the Rousseauian "good savage," must cease to use ethnographic data either as an escape or a vehicle for expressing our personal social discontent (1966:138).

But What About Dialogue?

It does not seem necessary to reiterate the basic evangelical approach to dialogue per se: The church has been mandated to bear witness to Jesus Christ. This demands the use of the dialogic method in that the objective must be to engage the listeners' minds — by listening and learning as well as by speaking and

instructing. Only through such dialogue can one be assured that this witness is relevant and that the conscience is addressed (2 Co 4:2). After all, the issue is Jesus Christ — he is to be not merely admired but acknowledged as Lord through repentance and faith.

The Bible is filled with endorsement of the dialogic method. God is the greatest Listener and the most searching Questioner. But when his servants, the prophets, his Son or the apostles engaged in dialogue, they always subordinated it to the truth they proclaimed. In so doing they cooperated harmoniously with the Spirit, who convinces the world of sin and of righteousness and judgment (Jn 16:8-11). The Spirit's objective is universal in its intent — to unmask all false religion as sin and to call people to face the all-important question: "What have you done with God?" (Bavinck 1960:223).

The subject of dialogue has been adequately discussed by scholars who have explored its dimensions in a way consonant with evangelical presuppositions (Stott 1975:58-81; Hesselgrave 1978:227-240). Also, nonevangelical writers have likewise debated this at length, although they have ranged widely in their presuppositions with the result that the discussion has become rather diffuse and has often bordered on the radical. Earlier writers felt evangelism to be antithetical to dialogue — "most undesirable and incompatible" is the phrase de Silva uses (Samartha 1971:55) — and recent conciliar conferences on the subject have only infrequently included references to "mission" and "evangelism" (WCC 1977:136). But it should be noted that the most recent CWME gathering at Melbourne spoke otherwise:

The proclamation of the Word of God is . . . [a] witness, distinct and indispensable. The story of God in Christ is the heart of all evangelism, and this story has to be told, for the life of the present Church never fully reveals the love and holiness and power of God in Christ (WCC 1980:193).

A later monthly letter on evangelism by Emilio Castro, director of CWME, includes the excellent statement:

What I know as a preacher, as an evangelist, is that I must call every creature to make a personal decision for Jesus Christ with the understanding that that means conversion, forgiveness, commitment of life to the service of the Lord and hope in his mercy for life eternal. In our Christian proclamation, we confront people with the great "Yes" of God to humankind and we invite them to accept fully that offering of forgiveness, new life, passing from death to life (1981:2,3).

And What About Truth?

Frankly, at this point I want to call for a shift away from further discussion of dialogue based on the older thesis that always seems to end up with evangelicals left out in the cold — stubbornly unwilling to move forward into the full expression of community and genuine openness of mind toward all those who similarly confess Jesus as Lord but do not buy their presuppositions.

In October 1979 a significant conference was convened at Union Theological Seminary, Richmond, to grapple with issues related to "Christ's Lordship and Religious Pluralism". Those who attended had their minds stretched and their hearts warmed. But I got myself into a bind that the conference failed to resolve, for I looked for a solution to the all-too-common phenomenon of evangelicals talking past their opposite numbers. My problem arose not over the ease with which Christ's Lordship was confessed — I do not doubt the sincerity of any who confessed Jesus as Lord — but over their reluctance, having so confessed him, to focus on the related issue of truth.

In my formal response to Samartha's keynote address on the theme of that conference, I asked what was meant by the Lordship of Christ and then attempted to answer my own question.

According to the witness of the Gospels, Christ's Lordship is inseparably linked with the issue of truth. Jesus himself said, "You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am" (Jn 13:13). Throughout the Gospels he unabashedly and with self-conscious authority claimed to be *the* Teacher and *the* Lord of all humankind. Hence, the test of one's submission to his Lordship is the acceptance of his teaching.

I was disappointed that Dr. Samartha's paper did not raise this issue. He affirmed Christ's Lordship but did not mention his teaching. And this, even though a careful reading of the Gospels uncovers the fact that Christ was not silent about many matters related to religious pluralism. Dr. Samartha's dichotomy runs the danger of reconceptualizing the Lordship of Christ into something bearing little resemblance to the reality described in Scripture. "My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me. . . . Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do what I tell you?" (Jn 7:16; Lk 6:46). John Stott summarizes for us this insistent obligation when he affirms:

We must allow our opinions to be moulded by his opinions, our views to be conditioned by his views. And this includes his uncomfortable and unfashionable teaching — of God, of Scripture, of the radical sinfulness of [persons], of the fact of divine judgment and of the solemn and eternal

realities of heaven and hell . . . with a great gulf fixed between them (1970:210).

This brings up a second question: *Can one be a true disciple of Jesus and not engage in the struggle for truth?* This struggle largely characterized his public ministry. It is a plain fact of the Gospels that Jesus was not only controversial, he was a controversialist. He was anything but reluctant to issue warnings against the false teaching of some of the religious leaders of his day (Mt 16:6). He repeatedly engaged them in controversy over the issue of truth. They were critical of him and he was outspokenly critical of them. On one memorable occasion he told them they were "wrong" and then went on to state they were "quite wrong" (Mk 12:18-27). And this because they were ignorant of the Scriptures and of the power of God.

Again and again he spoke his convictions without hesitation, apology or diffidence. He taught the most profound truths with quiet, unabashed dogmatism: "His word was with authority" (Lk 4:32; Mt 7:28,29; etc.). And those who confessed him as Lord made no attempt to substitute their opinions for his, or to adopt any other stance than to contend earnestly for the faith he delivered to them. As Floyd Filson has admirably summarized:

The ancient world was a ferment of competing philosophies and religions. Denunciations of false teachers in the New Testament show that not every Christian teacher avoided the danger of surrendering to the world something essential. The steadying content of Scripture, the Jewish heritage of monotheism and moral obedience to God, and above all the *teaching, example and work of Jesus himself* enabled the church to stay clear of the swirling waters of pagan syncretism (1973:707).

But Dr. Samartha does not call us to follow this pattern of making Jesus' teaching and praxis of truth the center of our witness. Rather, he states: "There is no reason to claim that the religion developed in the desert around Mount Sinai is superior to the religion developed on the banks of the river Ganga." And I can only reply: *"The question is not superiority but truth."*

If we accept the witness of the Gospels that Jesus Christ is God incarnate, there can surely be no fuller disclosure of God in [human] terms . . . than is given in his person and teaching. It is the task of the church to treasure this deposit of disclosure and proclaim its mysteries. At all times it is to be "the pillar and foundation of the truth" (1 Tim 3:15). It holds this truth firm so that it is not moved and it holds this truth aloft so that all may see it (Stott 1970:26). No other religion makes such claims and endures such agonies to defend them.

Something New in Science: A Paradigm Approach

It is in connection with this unresolved issue of truth that I would like to suggest an alternative approach — one that is gaining increasing acceptance within the scientific community, but not without intense debate. This was sparked by a rather erudite volume, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962, 1970) by Thomas S. Kuhn of the Institute of Advanced Study at Princeton University. Kuhn's thesis begins with a radical

postulate: We must repudiate utterly the highly idealized image of science on which all of us were brought up. He refers to the "Sunday Supplement" version — that science is the devoted and highly rational activity of a community of dispassionate experts objectively involved in the progressive discovery of truth. Kuhn shows that the history of scientific exploration records just the opposite. Through an impressive marshaling of facts he demonstrates that science has been and continues to be heavily influenced by nonrational intuitions and procedures. In fact, the record of scientific investigation shows a sequence of peaceful interludes punctuated by intellectually violent revolutions in each of which a new conceptual world view rises up to challenge what has gone before — but a world view which, despite its complexity and newness, does not automatically come any closer to the truth.

Kuhn then goes on to expound the nature of these revolutions in which efforts are put forth to replace the older paradigm with one that allegedly can solve the problems that brought it to the point of crisis. What particularly stimulated me was his contention that although paradigm change cannot be justified by proof, even so scientists can be persuaded to change their minds (1970:152,153). In the final analysis, such decisions are inevitably made on faith, and only by those scientists who have been particularly exercised over the prior crisis. Kuhn states:

If a paradigm is ever to triumph it must gain some first supporters, [those] who will develop it to the point where hardheaded arguments can be produced and multiplied. And even those arguments, when they come, are not individually decisive. Because scientists are reasonable [people], one or another argument will ultimately persuade many of them. But there is no single group conversion; what occurs is an increasing shift in the distribution of professional allegiances. . . . If the paradigm is one destined to win its fight, the number and strength of the persuasive arguments in its favor will increase (1970:158,159).

Fortunately, Kuhn's insightful ideas have been expounded for mere mortals like me by Ian G. Barbour in his engaging volume *Myths, Models, and Paradigms* (1974). In this comparative study of science and religion, he grapples with the subject before us (pp. 119-146), and establishes the thesis that although complementary models can exist within a single paradigm, paradigms themselves are not complementary.

A person can fully share the outlook of only one tradition at a time and not just

a set of beliefs; it is an organic whole of which ideas are only one part (1974:147).

So much for Kuhn and Barbour: let me recommend them both.

A Paradigm Approach to Dialogue

Here is a new way of looking at the contemporary debate on Christianity and the religions. Although space will prevent my expounding this in detail, the following theses should suffice to mark out the new steps we might take in the current debate:

1. Each religious system constitutes an apodictic paradigm. Within itself, it seeks to provide answers to the ultimate questions concerning the origin, purpose and destiny of the cosmos, of human society and of individuals. The answers to these questions comprise a unique wholeness — “Truth” — that is greater than the sum of its parts. And each part loses its meaning and significance when separated from the whole “Truth”.

2. No two religious systems ask precisely the same ultimate questions, nor do their answers occupy the same proportionate importance within the whole “Truth”. For instance, Buddhists do not inquire much into the nature of sin (*pavam*); Hindus are disinterested in eschatology, being preoccupied with fertility and renewal (*samsara*); Muslims are concerned with faith in Allah (*Iman*) and surrender to him (*Islam*); and animists seek safety, security and success in the midst of a dangerous world.

3. We tend to assume that Christianity is likewise a distinct paradigm. And it is — within the parameters of Scripture where its concerns are God and persons, sin and death, Jesus Christ and the Cross, redemption and reconciliation, the nations and the end of the world. Its decision of faith involves the correlation of Old Testament promise and New Testament fulfillment, for Christians align themselves with a connected sequence of events (*Heilsgeschichte*) unfolding in history and belonging to it in which the self-demonstration of God in Jesus Christ is prepared and realized. This sequence may not be “demythologized, or de-historicized, or de-objectified” without relinquishing thereby its right to being a distinct paradigm (Cullmann 1964:70).

4. Within the paradigm of Christianity defined above there have often been competing theories — such as between Jewish and Gentile believers in the Apostolic Church (Ac 15), and later

between the Orthodox and Catholic and between Lutherans, Reformed and Arminians. But despite their differences, all these theories have been regarded as tolerable since all have continued to give the same general answers to the basic questions. Whereas within Christianity, broadly and inclusively defined, one may find slightly different affirmations of truth, the essence remains with the same assumptions, the same questions asked and the same sources used in the search for all essential truth.

5. However, a new “Christianity” paradigm will emerge when the assumptions, questions and sources are changed.

Despite the difficulty encountered in defining with precision all the fringe characteristics of evangelicalism, all evangelicals regard themselves as constituting a common paradigm of truth commitment. And this despite their awareness that they are to be found throughout the total organizational spectrum of the Christian movement. But when evangelicals ponder today’s wide range of literature on religious encounter they begin to receive mixed signals. They sense with appreciation the varied ways in which many writers have sought to remain loyal to the essence of Christianity. But they have been troubled when they have perceived others making concessions on essentials — concessions without scriptural warrant. To them, this is evidence of a shift in truth commitment that makes it increasingly difficult for them to enter the wider circle of those who confess Jesus as Lord but approach the issue of religious dialogue differently.

No person can serve two masters simultaneously; neither can the Christian movement serve a variety of truth commitments and yet claim a transcending oneness that rises above the issue of truth. Evangelicals will agree that true dialogue demands respect and courage along with openness to new insights about one’s own religious commitment. It also necessitates the absence of coercion, the affirmation of one’s personal conviction and freedom from intolerance. But all this does not mean that the evangelical is silent about the call to repentance and faith (Bosch 1977:205-213).

To surrender conversion as the ultimate goal is, therefore, not a consequence of modesty, but of false modesty. If, in anxiety to avoid spiritual arrogance or in our striving after solidarity with others, we should begin to “demonize”, we would rob the salt of its savour or put the lamp under a meal-tub. The surrender of conversion would, in any event, land us in a totally other spiritual climate than that of the New Testament (ibid:211).

Christianity: A Single or Multiple Paradigm?

"A totally other spiritual climate" is what Professor Bosch calls it. Kuhn and Barbour would be more specific and speak of a new truth configuration, a new *Gestalt*, a new paradigm. And the introduction of a new paradigm means an intellectual revolution of major proportions for religious encounter. To put it this way may add a discordant note to our fellowship. But Kuhn would argue that this is unavoidable until the reality of two separate paradigms is freely acknowledged: not one Christianity troubled by internal upheavals and conflicts — but several. Have we come to this?

"Christianity is Christ." We like to affirm this, for it is essentially true. But what is the data base for this affirmation? Evangelicals confess that Christianity's data base must be *sola scriptura*. In their considered judgment the canonical Scriptures constitute "the only infallible rule of faith and practice". Scripture's themes are many and they are all interrelated — the triune God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit; the enemy: Satan and his hosts; people as fallen and lost, dead in trespasses and sins but addressable by God; sin as demanding judgment; and salvation through Christ alone.

Another Christian paradigm would approach Scripture differently. Faith and Order Paper No. 99 of the World Council of Churches is a compilation by Ellen Flesseman-van Leer (1980) of the successive studies undertaken over the years within the conciliar movement on the Bible — its authority and interpretation. It needs to be studied alongside the evaluative writings of Rowe (1969) and Sadgrove (1975) on the same subject because they reflect a theological shift of major proportions which has been taking place within that segment of the church which has led in promoting the discussion of interreligious dialogue.

The issue is the authority of the Bible. Down through the years the church has held to the intimate manner in which its unity, inspiration and authority are interrelated. Scripture is not ambiguous in its witness to itself as the Word of God and in the claim that through it God speaks to persons. But when Scripture witnesses to its essential unity, the focus is not on its literary structure or on its theological coherence. The focus is not even on its record of God's redemptive acts down through history, culminating in the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus of

Nazareth. The Bible is far more a record of living persons than of doctrinal formulations. And its claim to its oneness in diversity is found in "its open secret": Jesus Christ himself who was "manifested in the flesh, vindicated in the Spirit, seen by angels, preached among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory" (1 Tm 3:16). He is the Bible's unifying principle.

One recalls Luther's comments on Psalm 40:7, "Lo, I come; in the roll of the book it is written of me." Luther asked, "What Book and what Person?" Then he answered his own question, "Scripture; and only one Person, Jesus Christ." In saying this he was only reiterating the witness of Christ himself. In his encounter with the Jews he affirmed, "You search the scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness to me" (Jn 5:39). And he went on to say, "If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote of me" (Jn 5:46). Again and again Jesus referred to the Scriptures as pointing to himself (Mt 21:42-46; Mk 14:27; Lk 24:25-27, 44-47). And in the Apostolic Church this witness was confirmed (Ac 2:25-36, 3:20-22; 8:30-35; 13:32-37; 17:2,3; 18:24-28).

In the light of its Christological unity, evangelicals see in the Bible something far removed from a miscellaneous collection of diverse writings. They find it rather a corporate organism, an integrated unity — the Word of God — inspired and authoritative. Furthermore, they find the Bible not silent on the issue of the truth of God and the religions that crowd this world. Despite all the "searching and critical investigation" to which the Bible has been subjected over the years, evangelicals have yet to feel that they need abandon the truth paradigm that "all scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the [person] of God may be complete, equipped for every good work" (2 Tm 3:16,17).

In the earlier years of the ecumenical movement many things were said and written that were most encouraging to evangelicals. One recalls with appreciation the witness of Visser 't Hooft, of Hendrik Kraemer, of Suzanne de Diétrich, of Robert Martin-Achard. One only differed with them on the details. As recently as New Delhi (1961) the World Council's basis was amended to include the phrase, "according to the Scriptures," as definitive of its confession of "the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour." Visser 't Hooft endorsed this with the word:

Our movement can only be a dynamic movement toward greater unity, if we listen together to the one voice which gives us our marching orders (Sadgrove 1975:2).

New Delhi's statements on the Bible assumed its essential unity as

a united testimony to the same saving events; and since these events are decisive for [humankind] as a whole, it follows that the biblical writers are addressing [people] of all ages as their contemporaries (ibid:3).

New Delhi reflected "Guiding Principles for the Interpretation of the Bible" defined at the Ecumenical Study Conference at Wadham College, Oxford, 1949. In fact, for almost 15 years following the Wadham conference, the official line was: "Any teaching that clearly contradicts the biblical position cannot be accepted as Christian" (Flesseman-van Leer 1980:14).

By 1963, however, this position began to erode, and soon a paradigm shift of major proportions had emerged. At the Fourth World Conference on Faith and Order at Montreal, Professor Ernst Käsemann confessed in a plenary address that he was unable to see any unified picture of the New Testament *ecclesia* emerging from the records of its various witnesses. This seemed to mark the end of the dominance of Barthian theology in the WCC and the beginnings of a radical turn in its approach to Scripture. By 1967 the focus was on "The Significance of the Hermeneutical Problem for the Ecumenical Movement" (Bristol: Faith and Order Commission). The Bible was now seen as a variety of traditions and insights, some better than others. This stress on biblical diversity led to a crisis touching the Bible's authority, with its witness to "only one element in a variegated complex of truth."

By the time of the Fourth Assembly of the WCC in Uppsala (1968), the question was raised whether it was possible to find illumination from the Bible on the ethical issues of the day. At Louvain in 1971, the Faith and Order Commission found its central question not concerned with translating the Christian faith into action but with the actual content of the Christian faith. If the Bible represents diversity, is there not an element of provisionality in any and all suggested interpretations of it? Will this not mean that we can make the Bible say anything we choose? In the midst of this one finds theologians saying that the Church has never expected that [its] members must necessarily share all Jesus' beliefs. . . . The fact of culture change is recognized in Scripture, which

itself shows how a universal faith takes different forms in different cultural settings (Sadgrove 1975:17).

Conclusion

What can evangelicals say to this? Surely a paradigm shift with far-reaching implications is taking place. Evangelicals, by definition, approach the issue of religious pluralism from the perspective of the unity and authority of the Bible. Nonevangelicals tend to say that its authority is not a "self-contained entity, but a means whereby they may know in the present the Lordship of the living Jesus Christ" (Cunliffe-Jones, quoted by Rowe 1969:69,70). This means that the authority of the Bible is in Jesus Christ — in our present encounter with him — and not in the book as such. Such a nontraditional presupposition demands a radically different way of interpreting the Scriptures. Inevitably a "new hermeneutic" had to be devised so that despite its "very divisive literary traditions" and the possibility of "real contradictions" and the "fading hope" of finding "one biblical message", the Bible might somehow make its contribution to the understanding of truth (Rowe 1969:71ff).

This paradigm shift has brought us all to a full stop. It cannot be ignored. I read Wilfred Cantwell Smith's most recent book, *Toward a World Theology* (1981b), in order to understand his evaluation of my rejoinder to Dr. Samartha. At that conference Professor Smith pointedly said:

Dr. Glasser pled the importance of truth. For a moment I was tempted to respond by pleading for the moral injunctions, rather, of the Christian revelation. As we face Christ on the cross, and as teacher, we are made aware of imperatives toward reconciliation, [fellowship], the dignity of the neighbor, peace, concord, respect; matters with all of which denigration of others' forms of faith collides. Exclusivism strikes more and more Christians as immoral. *If the head proves it true*, while the heart sees it as wicked, un-Christian, then should Christians not follow the heart? Maybe this is the crux of our dilemma (1981a:202 — emphasis added).

I have quoted this statement at length because it clearly represents the position of those who confess Christ's Lordship but follow a different truth paradigm when they approach the issues of the day. In his latest book Professor Smith's categories for truth find him defining salvation in an exceedingly — in my judgment — sub-biblical fashion. He ranges widely and includes such poignant realities as

saved from nihilism, from alienation, anomie, despair; from the bleak despondency of meaninglessness. Saved from unfreedom; from being the victim of one's own whims within, or of pressures without; saved from being merely an organism reacting to its environment (1981b:168).

All of these are terribly valid, but why does he leave out the basic element of salvation in the apostolic writings: deliverance from the wrath of God and reconciliation to his fellowship through the blood of Christ? And when he defines faith, he speaks of a "global human quality" whereby Christians are "saved through Christ's death and resurrection," Buddhists are "saved through the teachings of Buddha," Jews are "saved through that Torah that Christians have made a point of misunderstanding," and Hindus are "saved, inspired, encouraged, and made creative, through the poetry of the Gita" (1981b:171ff).

Is dialogue possible across the gulf of these two distinct paradigms? We are faced, it seems to me, with nothing less than evidence for one of Kuhn's "violent intellectual revolutions". Which paradigm will win the day? The church has known bitter and prolonged struggles of this sort in the past. And it has enjoyed some great victories. Perhaps this is why evangelicals find no alternative but to stand pat on their commitment to the Bible: "the only infallible rule of faith and practice."

AFG

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MT 533: Theology of Religious Encounter
March 8, 1985

Essay Review: The Problem of Proselytization: An Evangelical Perspective, by Vernon C. Grounds.

After having read many of these essays its hard to know when to relax. I'm always expecting the "Baby to be thrown out with the bath water." Fortunately Dr. Grounds' essay is exactly what it claims to be, a look at evangelism to the Jews from a Evangelical perspective with a concern for doing what's right (evangelism) and avoiding the abuses (proselytism).

After showing that evangelism is at the very heart of Christianity (from the New Testament perspective) he methodically delineates the three points at which the Jewish community call for its abandonment: Civility, History, and Theology. He then promotes the concept that the only (or best) way to keep evangelism from become proselytism is Love. It sounds simple enough, but the profundity has seem to escaped mankind for the last two-thousand years.

Rec. 3-19-85

Joe Bustillos MT 533: Theology of Religious Encounter March 8, 1985

good work

Essay Review: Dialogue or Mission or . . . ? by Robert L. Lindsey.

Lindsey's article is an insightful treatment of the questions pertaining to Jewish-Christian relations. He begins by setting up the present state of affairs, that is Modern Christianity's reluctance to call Israel to faith in Christ. He then lists the following assumptions (that are assumed by Christians [?]) that are commonly considered in discussing Jewish-Christian relations: (1) "Judaism" equals Rabbinic Judaism, (2) the separation between Judaism and Christianity [encouraged by the fourth century Church], (3) Christianity's Anti-Semitic history [questions of collective guilt], and (4) the rejection of Jewish identity [to be Christian is to not be Jewish and vis-a-versa]. He then discusses the reality of Christianity's desire (though confused in my estimation) for the survival of Judaism and not the demise that the Jews fear. The balance of his discussion is then turned to the question of Jewish identity and the struggles that the Jewish community has faced in discovering that identity. (I will discuss his misuse of the parable of the Prodigal Son later in this review).

The problem of identity is intimately related to the accusation that to bring a Jew to a "conversion" to Christ is an act of genocide. Lindsey is correct in presenting this confused understanding of Jewishness. The dichotomy between the Church and its own Jewish heritage is tragic (though perhaps at the time a necessary move, a la the Reformation). And now that we have come this far and uncovered the cultural garb that has obstructed our understanding and the humanness of our ecclesiastical organizations and that we grasp the will of God like so many strands of fine (but strong) hair, to not promote the continuity, yes and the discontinuity between the "Hallakah" and the "Euaggelion" would be a denial of all these things that we claim to know. The Gospel is to the Jew first, oh yeah, and also to the Greek. Jesus came not to destroy the Law but to fulfill it. What Law? The "Torah," the "Nebiim," and the "Kethubim." He told the Pharisees in John Nine to read Moses, in it they would see him. This is not the possession of Western Civilization. We are its offspring not its custodians. It was born in a Syrian desert and found its fullest expression along the shores of the sea of Galilee and on a hill outside of Jerusalem. The Jews have tragically rejected their Messiah but we . . . we who were not a "people" have been made a people of God, "not with human hands." So for the Jew to be "Christian" is to be truly Jewish and for the Gentile it is poignantly undeserved salvation from the Jewish Messiah.

Regarding Lindsey's unfortunate use of the parable of the Prodigal Son . . . oyve! The parable has nothing to do with Jewish-Christian relations. It's meant to deal with the openness of a class of people to the Act of God going on in their midst

and the rejection of that Act by those who should know better.
No more no less. I'm sure his inclusion was meant to address
Rosenzweig's interpretation. But that interpretation perpetrates
the very attitude that the parable is meant to counter. The
religious need to come to faith and repentance just like the
sinner. "Others will be seated with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob
but the Children of the Kingdom will be left in outer darkness." || ✓

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Excellent

A Look at the Lausanne Occasional Papers
No. 10: Thailand Report-
Christian Witness to Nominal Christians Among Roman Catholics

This pamphlet is a look at the Evangelical Church's approach to evangelism and the Roman Catholic Church. The material is presented in a very clear and balanced manner. It is a very much appreciated breath of fresh air. The only other publication written by a Protestant on Catholicism that I have read is Loraine Boettner's rather dated Roman Catholicism, which reads like a propaganda treatise on all the bad things you'd want to know about Catholicism (only surpassed in hurtful misinformation by the book Two Babylons). ✓

After carefully explaining the purpose of the study and defining what a "Nominal Christian" is, the authors move toward the problem of Roman Catholicism and "Nominal Christianity." A lot of unnecessary verbiage is saved by dealing with Catholicism in its present Post-Vatican II expressions and by excluding the normal useless arguments that tend to clutter other Protestant treatments of Catholicism. The study also has an up-to-date feel about it (focusing on Pope John-Paul II's activities, the recent censure of Hans Kung and warnings to the Jesuits about excessive Liberalism, etc.). In the section on "Understanding the Mind-set" ✓

of Roman Catholics" the difficulty of placing Roman Catholics into understandable groupings is appreciated by this reviewer. ✓
It's difficult for me to find anything wrong with their divisions but at the same time a little more should have been written about the limited nature of seeing Catholicism only under these categories. In the section "Why does a Roman Catholic become non-practicing?" and the next, "To what degree are most Roman Catholics aware of the gospel?" the authors are faced with the problems of applying a Reformation understanding of Salvation into the above mentioned Roman Catholic mindset. On the whole, the gaps between what is considered a Biblical understanding of salvation and common Catholic practice is readily expressed ✓
without denying the Roman Catholic dignity as a human being or the sincerity with which he practices (or at least adheres to) his chosen Faith. (Gone are the sophomoric phrases, "How could they believe that?"). ✓

In the section, "Barriers That Hinder Evangelization of Nominal Christians among Roman Catholics" and the next "Bridges to Effective Evangelization of Nominal Christians among Roman Catholics" the authors touch on a point that I find mandatory in understanding why a Catholic (practicing or non-practicing) would reject the overtures of a Protestant concerning having a "personal relationship with Christ": Consistent life-style! In a world where nearly everything is measured by what can be seen and observed any Catholic worth his weight in salt will reject out of hand any supposed "Truth" that is not demonstrated in the life of the person making the claim. The vagueness of Religion is bad enough without having to deal with some nebulous religion that ✓

doesn't even seem to be working in the lives of those that claim it. The known (even if it's wrong) will never be abandoned for the unobserved. I really don't think enough can be said (or written) about this point. Don't talk to me about truth claims, show me your life. I know of one Jesuit under whom I studied at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles who, having witnessed the debacle of the Separatist movement in the earlier part of this century, is convinced that Protestants have nothing to say in terms of being "True Christianity." Their whole fixation for splitting churches is a complete denial of Saint Paul's epistle to the Ephesians 4:4ff:

There is one body and one Spirit---just as you were called to one hope when you were called---one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

Saint James writes:

Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do. You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that--and shudder. You foolish man, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? Was not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did." (James 2:18b-22)

Don't confuse this with a Salvation-by-works game. It's not a question of Salvation-by-works, but if your Salvation doesn't produce any works than is it true? How can it be true? Again, show me something that works in the Real World.

Another point touched on by the authors is regarding the way in which the Gospel is presented. Something that is perhaps a

consideration for those of us in the First World, with our dichotomized view of reality (i.e., Secular and Sacred categories, thank you Kant), is whether the Gospel is presented because of a recognized need on the part of the Nominal Catholic or because "the Evangelist" needs another notch on his spiritual six-shooter. Giving answers to questions that haven't been asked is generally considered rude. A friend of mine who says that she isn't "Religious" read a section of this pamphlet ("Christians need to increase in hospitality," p. 25) and commented that it's been her experience that people she knew who became Christians were anything but hospitable when she rejected their beliefs. Their testimony was never made because she wanted to know or asked for it. They just seemed to see it as their duty to straighten her out. Needless to say she has lost friends and Christ has not gained her confidence. /

The faith and commitment expressed by the authors of this pamphlet is to be commended. In a very practical way they have presented an overview of the needs that must be met if we who call ourselves Christians are going to bring some of our Catholic brothers and sisters to a full relationship to Christ. ✓

LOVE TO SOMEONE HOW
HAS MY EXPERIENCE OF IT, MUCH LESS TRY
TO EXPRESS LOVE IN THE CONTEXT OF
GOD? I REALLY DON'T KNOW.

BUT ^{WHAT} I DO KNOW IS THAT I WANT THAT
LOVE IN MY LIFE. I WANT WORKS OF WHAT
DAVID HAD, OR PAUL, OR JOHN, OR ANY
AND. I UNDERSTAND THAT AS I GROW
IN MY LOVE FOR GOD THAT IT'LL BE MORE
NATURAL FOR ME TO SHARE WHAT I HAVE
W/ GOD W/ OTHERS.

~~I HOPE THAT THOSE OF YOU THAT ARE~~
~~CHRISTIAN ARE GRASPING THIS CONCEPT~~
BUT LIKE DAVID, IN VERB
7 OF PSALM 130 - I WANT TO COMMUNICATE
^{CONVINCING} YOU TO APPRECIATE THIS GIFT OF LOVE THAT GOD HAS
GIVEN YOU. IT'S THE SAME REASON FOR EVERY
THAT THAT GOD'S DONE FOR US & SHOULD BE THE SAME
REASON TO DO NOTHING TOWARDS HIM.

GET RID OF ANYTHING THAT WOULD GET IN
THE WAY OF THIS RELATIONSHIP - IT'S
FOR TOO PRECIOUS TO SPOIL HALF DEAD

AND TO YOU WHO WANT THIS FINEST
THING OFF WHAT I'M SAYING LET US
JUST SAY THAT THE GOD OF THE UNIVERSE,
THE ONE THAT CREATED ALL OF THE BEAUTIFUL
YOU'VE EXPERIENCED HAS AN INTIMATE
CONCERN FOR YOU. HE WANTS YOU TO KNOW
HIS LOVE.

PS 1

WHO - RUSSO MAN

WHERE ?

WHEN ?

WHAT

- ① DOESN'T WALK IN THE COURSE OF THE WICKED
- ② STAND IN THE WAY OF SINNERS
- ③ SIT IN THE SEAT OF THE WICKED

DOES:

- ① DELIGHTS IN THE WORDS LAW
- ② MEDIATES (PEACE/CONCORD) ↓

RESULTS:

→ TREE ILLUSTRATION

"WHATEVER HE DOES PROSPERS"

BUT THE WICKED!

CHAFF ILLUSTRATION - BURN AWAY

SUMMARY:

GOD WALKS WISE - PROTECTS/CONCORDS THE PIOUS
THE WICKED ↓ PERISH!!

dsy: RIGHT → WORDS LAW → PROSPER
WICKED ↓
PERISH

app: WORDS LAW IN MY LIFE?

① DAVID & HIS LOVE FOR GOD (~~REALLY~~
REMEMBER) NATURAL

② Frustration RE: WHAT GOD MEANS
TO ME (TERMINOLOGY)

③ FRIENDSHIP - OK
BUT W/ DAVID SEEMS NATURAL

④ I WANT THAT -
FRUSTRATION "HOW DO I EXPRESS IT"

~~BUT~~ I DON'T KNOW

BUT I WANT DAVID PAUL JOHN
NATURAL

PURSUE IT - IT TOO VALUABLE

⑤ NO IGEM ?

PS 130

GOD LOVE YOU -
- Jesus DID IT
- ASK US.

BUT IF YOU PUT IT IN THE
CONTEXT OF THIS PARTICULAR FRIENDSHIP
THAT I HAVE W/ GOD — THEN I
CAN GET BEHIND IT — I FEEL MORE
AT HOME EXPRESSING IT THAT WAY.

BUT W/ DAVID IT SEEMED LIKE SUCH
A NATURAL PROCESS — DAVID'S LOVE FOR
GOD JUST SPILLS OUT INTO PRAISE &
OPEN EXPRESSION OF THEIR RELATIONSHIP

I WANT THAT. I WANT THAT DEPTN DAVID
EXPERIENCES IN HIS RELATIONSHIP W/ GOD.

BUT I FIND THAT EVEN THAT CAN
SOMETIMES BE FRUSTRATING.

I FIND AT THOSE TIMES WHEN GOD
SEEM MOST IN MY LIFE I HAVE FEWER
WORDS TO EXPRESS IT.

②

DAVID WAS DEEPLY IN LOVE
W/ HIS GOD - & THE ARTIST IN HIM
WOULDN'T LET HIM KEEP QUIET ABOUT IT -
THE BOOK OF PSALMS.

LAST NIGHT LISTENING TO PHIL KEAGY
EXPRESS HIS LOVE^d REMINDED ME OF
HOW NATURAL THIS SHOULD BE.

IT'S ALWAYS BEEN A BIG FRUSTRATION IN
MY LIFE TO TRY TO SHARE WHAT GOD MEANS
TO ME. MAYBE ITS THE WORDS CHRISTIANS
USE — "WITNESS" & "TESTIFY"
"EVANGALIZING" SOUNDS LIKE 'A COURT
ROOM TO ME - I MEAN WHAT DO I
KNOW ABOUT COURT ROOMS.

BUT
Σ (1)

I mean how do you explain
love to someone who hasn't experienced
it. - much less love & God.
I really don't know

BUT what I do know is that I
want ~~what I want~~ that love in my love.
I want more of what David had, or
Paul, or John, had.

I understand that as I grow in
my love for God that it'll be
more natural for me to share what I
have w/ God w/ others.

Just like David, in verse 7 of Psalm
130 - I want to challenge you
Christian to persevere this gift of
love that God has given you. ~~It's the~~
~~same reason for every time that~~
③

IT'S THE SOLE REASON FOR EVERYTHING
THAT NB'S DOES FOR US I SHOULD BE THE
WHOLE REASON WE DO ANYTHING TOWARDS.
WIN

GET RID OF ANYTHING THAT WOULD GET
IN THE WAY OF THIS RELATIONSHIP - IT'S
FAIR TO PRECIOUS TO SEEK
HALF-HEARTED.

+ YOU WOULD BRING THE FINEST
IDEAS ABOUT WHAT I'M TALKING ABOUT
I JUST WANT TO SAY THAT THE GOD
OF THE UNIVERSE, THE GOD THAT CREATED
ALL OF THE BEAUTIFUL THINGS EXPERIENCED
HAS AN INTIMATE CONCERN FOR YOU.
HE WANTS YOU TO KNOW HIS LOVE.



DAVID WAS DEEPLY IN LOVE W/
HIS GOD - & THE ARTIST IN HIM
WOULDN'T LET HIM ^{ABOUT IT!} KEEP QUIET \rightarrow
_{LAST NIGHT}
THIS POOL OF PSALMS. LISTENING TO
POUL FENGY EXPRESS THIS LOVE REMINDS
ME OF THIS. \rightarrow HOW NATURAL THIS IS (SHOULD BE)

IT'S ALWAYS BEEN A BIG FRUSTRATION
IN MY LIFE ~~TO~~ ^{TRY TO} SHARE WHAT GOD
MEANS TO ME. MAYBE IT'S THE WORLD'S
CHRISTIANS USE "WITNESS" - SOUNDS LIKE
A COURT ROOM - ^{I MEAN} WHAT DO I KNOW ABOUT
COVERED ROOMS & WITNESSING.

6
2

BUT IF YOU PUT ~~THAT~~ IN THE CONTEXT OF
THIS PARTICULAR FRIENDSHIP THAT I HAVE w/
GOD, THEN I CAN GET BEHIND ^{IT} - I FEEL
MORE AT HOME EXPRESSING ^{IT} THAT WAY.

BUT w/ DAVID IT SEEMED LIKE SUCH A
NATURE PROCESS - DAVID'S LOVE FOR
^{JUST} GOD SPILLS OUT INTO PRAISE & OTHER
EXPRESSION OF THEIR RELATIONSHIP. w/ his
PB. w/
GOD

I WANT THAT. BUT I FIND THAT
THAT CAN SOMETIMES BE FRUSTRATING.
I FIND ~~AT~~ THOSE THINGS WHEN GOD SEEMS
MOST IN MY LIFE I HAVE FEWER WORDS
TO EXPRESS ~~THE~~ IT. I MEAN HOW DO YOU